


# PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION

 X-523


Re-Create  
the Fourth International

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## South Africa:

# The Proletarian Alternative

"The Republic of South Africa has always been regarded by foreign investors as a gold mine, one of those rare and refreshing places where profits are great and problems small. Capital is not threatened by political instability or nationalization. Labor is cheap, the market booming, the currency hard and convertible." (*Fortune*, 1972.)

"Emerging black economic power is an even more frightening prospect to South Africa's ruling whites than either international sanctions or violence in black townships. The 4.5 million whites are confronted with the certainty that strategic areas of the economy, particularly the nation's mines, will increasingly be operated by unionized blacks. ...[Reform] gestures may release enough steam to prevent the racial pressure cooker from exploding, but they cannot protect apartheid from its internal economic challenge." (*Business Week*, 1985.)

These citations from two leading U.S. business magazines summarize the tremendous advance of the South African black working class in the past decade. *Business Week* even underestimates the unrelenting township rebellions. The combination of anti-regime violence with the dynamic black working-class movement can provide a coherent strategy for overthrowing apartheid and its source, capitalism.

The Azanian workers, whose struggles are sometimes forgotten abroad amid all the excitement of divestment and sanctions campaigns, is playing an absolutely critical role. A massive two-day "stay-away" or general strike last November was the high point; nearly a million workers in South Africa's



*Black mineworkers could lead massive general strike and topple apartheid regime. That would further pose the question: should the new regime be engineered by Washington and mining companies or the Azanian workers?*

industrial and financial heartland, the Transvaal, participated. As with the momentous events in Poland of 1980, South Africa is once more demonstrating the Marxist teaching of the centrality of the proletariat

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for human liberation.

The lesson has not been lost on the U.S. ruling class. Secretary of State George Shultz recently observed that there was no longer any dispute among Americans about apartheid. "The present system is doomed," he said, because it is "totally reprehensible." The question is how to change it: "The only alternative to a radical, violent outcome is a political accommodation now, before it is too late."<sup>1</sup>

The chief foreign affairs agent of the world's most powerful imperialist power is not leaving the answer to chance. He has his plan of what to do and who should do it: "We look to the government of South Africa to work with blacks, black leaders and others in their country to bring it to an end."<sup>2</sup>

### Reform vs. Revolt

In effect Shultz regards the problem of South Africa's future as a problem of leadership. His solution is an attempt to reform apartheid from within, under the present ruling racists in combination with black leadership who will jointly seek to maintain the capitalism that gave it birth. "Shall we try to undermine the South African economy in an effort to topple the very people we are trying to help, as well as neighboring black countries whose economies are heavily dependent on South Africa?"<sup>3</sup>

Shultz is adamant that capitalism not be threatened, justifying his concern through hypocritical expressions of sympathy for the masses. He is right that the only alternative is radical (yes, and violent too, but that's because slavemasters never relinquish slavery without a fight). Leadership is the central question faced by the black masses and militants in South Africa and its neighbors, and by all

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## Back Issues

Back issues of this magazine contain in-depth analyses of a wide range of political, economic and social issues from the vantage point of revolutionary working-class communism. Topics covered include: internationalism vs. nationalism, the nature of Stalinist capitalism, modern reformism and the trade unions, imperialism, labor struggles, and the political economy of capitalism. Recent issues have focused on black liberation and the Democratic Party, reformism in Britain and Soviet imperialism.

We have had many articles on theoretical and practical questions of Trotskyism: the Transitional Program, the workers' government slogan, the labor party question and the general strike. The political history and views of the League for the Revolutionary Party have been presented, along with analyses of various left organizations in the U.S. and abroad.

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those around the world who support their liberation.

The choice is between leaders committed to capitalism based on mass exploitation and starvation, or the proletarian communist alternative dedicated to a new world of equality and abundance. As *Fortune* so happily put it, the essence of apartheid is its foundation on cheap labor through the vicious racial division of the working class. The goal of imperialism and local capitalism now is to maintain the huge reservoir of underpaid blacks while dismantling, under mass pressure, the legal structure of apartheid. The bourgeois task is to ride out this contradiction. The proletarian task is to smash it through revolution and working-class power.

In pursuit of a leadership combination favorable to its goals, the Reagan administration applauded the South African businessmen who have opened discussions with the most prominent black opposition force, the African National Congress (ANC). Although Reagan has consistently apologized for the racist rule of President P.W. Botha, the U.S. government is unhappy that the apartheidists are not joining in the accommodation process. Instead they refuse to offer any serious concessions to the ANC leaders and their United Democratic Front allies. Thus, Reagan and Shultz fear, Botha is cutting the ground out from underneath the only chance to link reputable black leaders with the white bourgeoisie, the plan they hope could pacify the black masses.

### Reaganites vs. Liberals

The black upheaval, of course, is what forced Reagan & Co. to recognize that apartheid is no longer tenable. The main difference between this wing of the ruling class and the moderate Democrats who preceded them in office is that the liberal imperialists saw the impending danger some time ago; they put (minimal) pressure on South Africa to reform apartheid and ward off the inevitable revolt.<sup>4</sup> (In the same way, the Reaganites are trying to persuade their pal President Marcos of the Philippines to make some reforms in order to stave off a deeper threat.) The massive

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## PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION

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# Nature of the Soviet System New Twists on Old Theories



*Poland 1980: hundreds of worker delegates meet as Interfactory Strike Committee. Despite theorists, the working class lives.*

Ernest Mandel and Tony Cliff are the leading spokesmen for two standard interpretations of the Soviet Union, theories that have been competing on the Marxist market since the 1940s. Mandel, head of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, retails a "bureaucratized workers' state" line that claims the authority of Leon Trotsky's original formula. Cliff, of the British Socialist Workers Party, Ltd., hawks a "state capitalist" alternative allegedly superior to Trotsky's old brand.

We, as champions of the communist consumer, have criticized both theories, showing that they reflect a cynical attitude toward the working class and fail to deliver on warranted promises: they contradict fundamental principles and fail to account for major historical developments. Both suppliers have recently issued updated and "improved" versions, so here we will examine the new products and prove that these have only brought the contradictions to new levels. Both lead to conclusions inimical to the triumph of proletarian communism. We note in advance that our analysis of the Soviet system as capitalist does not make us partisans of Cliff against Mandel: Cliff's arguments do not justify his "capitalist" conclusion. Indeed, despite their rivalry, the two theories under consideration run into closely related problems.

## **Mandel's "Workers' States"**

Mandel's theory is that the USSR remains blocked in its advance toward socialism by the party bureaucracy which usurped power from the working class. In

the case of the states organized on the Soviet model since World War II, the party took state power in the workers' name without the proletariat ever having held it. Nevertheless, given that these states are characterized by nationalized property, central planning and foreign trade monopolies, they are surely not capitalist; and given their revolutionary and/or proletarian origin, they have to be workers' states, albeit deformed. Mandel's theory also compels him to claim that the Stalinist economies are progressive in a basic sense: they are able to overcome capitalism's fetters on the productive forces and achieve a material expansion beyond that of bourgeois economy.

Thus in the chapter on the Soviet economy in his book Marxist Economic Theory (dating from about 1960), Mandel wrote as follows:

"The Soviet economy, ... while retaining definite links with world capitalist economy, is exempt from the fluctuations in the conjuncture of world economy. Indeed, periods of most remarkable advance by Soviet economy have coincided with periods of crisis, depression or stagnation in world capitalist economy."<sup>1</sup>

But what was true in the 1930s (when the Soviet Union was a degenerated workers' state) has since changed. There have been severe economic crises in Poland and Rumania, Yugoslavia has the highest unemployment and inflation in Europe, and China's economic collapse was so serious that its rulers felt it necessary to abandon their Stalinist version of Marxist economics. In general, the Soviet-type economies

have never found a way to escape their endemic problems of massive waste and low labor productivity. Their expansion continued to decelerate throughout the post-war period and by now is indistinguishable from the norm of traditional capitalist countries. Notably, the USSR's GNP growth rate has been behind the U.S.'s for the past decade.

### Mandel Updated

It took Mandel some time to recognize this reality; he always managed to find some glowing lining to the darkening clouds over the Stalinist economies. Now, however, he not only acknowledges Soviet stagnation but he goes overboard and denies any capacity for growth at all. Moreover, what he says is not just a misformulation, for he provides a theoretical explanation (as if to say he foresaw the new conditions all along). To preserve its full flavor we quote at length from a recent article on Soviet society:

"As long as the absolute scarcity of consumption goods persisted there -- i.e. from 1929 to 1950 -- securing the immediate necessities drove bureaucrats to work and whip workers on to double and triple activity. As soon as these immediate needs have been secured, the Soviet economy is confronted with the same problem that characterized all pre-capitalist societies. Dominant classes or strata (castes, etc.) whose privileges essentially can be reduced to private consumption have no objective long-term self-perceived interest in persistent increases in production. Increasing production and luxury consumption therefore go hand in hand with waste, senseless luxury, individual decadence in drink, orgies, drugs, etc. (compare the behavior of the nobility of the Roman Empire, the French court nobility of the 18th century, the Ottoman nobility of the 18th-19th century, and the Czarist nobility on the eve of the Russian revolution). The parallel with growing portions of the upper strata of the Soviet bureaucracy, as with the parasitical rentier strata under monopoly capitalism, is obvious. Only the capitalist entrepreneur class, under the spur of competition (i.e. from private property and generalized commodity production) is compelled to behave fundamentally differently: to transform most of its income and wealth into capital and thereby unceasingly to increase production. If competition languishes, capitalism tends toward stagnation, said Marx."<sup>2</sup>

In this amazing passage Mandel kicks his own theory in the teeth over and over again. We, who do not consider the Soviet Union progressive, would not go to such an extreme as Mandel: that the bureaucrats are not driven unceasingly to increase production. They most certainly are so driven: by the class struggle of the proletariat above all, by foreign rivals, and indeed by internal (although certainly restricted) competition. The system's severe crises are not due to the lack of a drive to accumulate but

to its fundamental contradictions and counter-drives. The reason for Soviet stagnation is approximately as Mandel indicates: as Marx pointed out, languishing competition leads to stagnation. But Marx was speaking of capitalism, not some other society; and for Marx, competition is the surface executor of capitalist accumulation, not its inner driving force (as Mandel implies). Mandel's paraphrase of Marx does, nevertheless, suggest that the way to analyze the USSR and its decline is to show that the capitalist laws of motion discovered by Marx do operate there.

Mandel, however, prefers to compare Soviet society to pre-capitalist modes of production. His likening of the Soviet rulers to past decadent classes is surely overdrawn; under Stalin the top officials caroused in the manner described but they are now reportedly more sober, at least under Andropov and Gorbachev. More importantly, what Mandel doesn't seem to understand is that the nefarious nobilities he lists all reflected class societies in decay -- which is precisely what we say the Stalinist USSR is, a form of decadent capitalism. (Parenthetically, Czarism in the years leading up to the Russian revolution was indeed profligate but also tried to spur rapid industrial development. Decadence and growth are not mutually exclusive, as Mandel implies.)

### Is the USSR Progressive?

Above all, it is hard to read Mandel's current assessment of Soviet society and grasp how he can still believe that this system is progressive over capitalism. Similarity to "all pre-capitalist societies" is hardly the sort of argument to convince the reader that the Soviet mode of production is post-capitalist, a favorite Mandelian term -- until now. Mandel's fundamental problem is that he is describing, accurately or not, a society which must be reactionary because it is incapable of advancing the forces of production. Calling it a workers' state is thus doubly absurd; this can only be regarded as an attempt to claim Trotsky's heritage despite vast gulfs in theory and reality.

## CAPITALISM IN THE SOVIET UNION

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### *The Rise and Decay of Stalinism*

As a matter of fact, when Trotsky fought against the Shachtman tendency in 1939-40 over the nature of the Soviet Union, he argued that the USSR still had its progressive dynamic despite the fetters imposed by the parasitic bureaucracy. Shortly thereafter Shachtman adopted the "bureaucratic collectivism" notion which asserted that bureaucratic consumption was the system's sole dynamic. Mandel has always shared this opinion, that "the consumption desires of the bureaucracy (like the consumption desires of precapitalist classes) and not the need to maximize accumulation and output, are the motive force behind bureaucratic management."<sup>3</sup> But now he is using it to draw the opposite conclusion: if the bureaucrats don't need to increase their personal needs there is no longer any progressive Soviet dynamic. This conclusion spells doom for any conception of a progressive Soviet system. In effect he is saying that Shachtman was right against Trotsky, but just ten years too early.

Marx said of the feudal lord that "the walls of his stomach set the limits to his exploitation of the peasant." Both Shachtman and Mandel apply this idea to the Soviet bureaucrats.<sup>4</sup> But it is certainly wrong to do so: how then does Mandel explain the Stalinist's well-known stress on Department I (means of production) over Department II (means of consumption)? If the driving force of the Soviet economy were indeed the bureaucrats' consumption, this wouldn't demand that Department II be privileged, since the bureaucracy is only a small fraction of the population; but it would rule out the USSR's capitalistic concentration on Department I.

Mandel's abrupt turnaround is apparently not fully considered; it leads to too many unanswered questions. If the laws of the Soviet system doom it to lag behind capitalism because of its lack of competition, would not the introduction of competitive institutions be progressive? Shouldn't Mandel say that the USSR is not only not progressive but even reactionary compared to capitalism, which at least has a drive, however fettered, to expand the productive forces?

On the political level, is Mandel laying the basis for openly supporting the "market socialism" illusions of Polish Solidarity? That would mesh with his opportunist leanings toward Walesa, Kuron & Co. Likewise, given his organization's yearnings toward the Sandinistas, the same theory would enable him to conclude that if Nicaragua is forced to nationalize more industry and thereby "eliminate competition," the re-

sult would be reactionary. He might well be aiming at a theoretical justification for the United Secretariat's egregiously anti-Trotskyist line that alliance with the bourgeoisie was essential for the Nicaraguan revolution. We cannot yet tell the precise direction of Mandel's thinking -- but that is because he has resolved his previous, merely contradictory, theory into an impenetrable maze.

### Still a Workers' State

Despite the logic of his new reasoning, Mandel does maintain his bureaucratized workers' state theory, or, more accurately, the same title for his new rationalization:

"In summary, the Soviet Union and similar socie-



*Workers at Wartburg Auto Works in East Germany busy creating no value, says Mandel. The specter of nonsense haunts "Marxism" today.*

ties are experiencing the beginning of a transformation of portions of the bureaucracy into a 'ruling class' -- not a "new bureaucratic ruling class" but the old well-known class of capitalist and private owners of the means of production. This transformation of bureaucrats into capitalists would express the process in which the law of value, instead of influencing the Soviet economy, comes to dominate it. Such a process, however, demands a generalization of commodity production, i.e., a transformation of means of production and labor power into commodities. To run full course, this process must destroy collective ownership of the means of production, institutionally guaranteed full employment, dominant central planning and the monopoly of foreign trade. This cannot occur simply at the purely economic level. It demands an ultimate historical defeat of the Soviet working class at the social and economic level. This defeat has not yet taken place."<sup>5</sup>

Mandel's argument that capitalist restoration has not yet occurred in the USSR is very weak. He concedes that sections of the Soviet bureaucracy are

transforming themselves into a ruling class -- as he must, for Trotsky said so in the late 1930s. But Mandel believes this transformation is only in its "beginning" -- which conforms with his undynamic conception that the bureaucracy has "frozen" the USSR's transition to socialism for half a century!<sup>6</sup> In fact, the institutions whose destruction Mandel requires for completion of the counterrevolution -- full employment, central planning, the foreign trade monopoly -- are largely destroyed in the case of Eastern European "transitional" societies like Yugoslavia and in China as well. In the USSR itself the devolution has been slower, but it is taking place there too.

Mandel is right about one thing: the Soviet counterrevolution requires an historical defeat of the working class. Tragically, it has already occurred. The crucial period was the late 1930s, when the Soviet working class was socially and politically defeated and the economic conditions became operationally if not formally decentralized. Admitting that the momentous defeat of the workers took place on the eve of World War II is an unpleasant task for a proletarian revolutionist, but it does serve to account for all the contradictions Mandel runs into.

#### Cliff's "State Capitalism"

In contrast to Mandel, Cliff holds that the counterrevolution occurred in 1928 with the start of the Soviet Five Year Plans. The Stalinists turned to all-out capital accumulation under the pressure of foreign, mainly military, competition. Cliff's theory of Soviet state capitalism is distinguished by his notion that capitalist conditions were imposed on the USSR not from its internal social relations but through this pressure from outside:

"Hence if one examines the relations within the Russian economy, one is bound to conclude that the source of the law of value, as the motor and regulator of production, is not to be found in it. In essence, the law prevailing in the relations between the enterprises and between the laborers and the employer-state would be no different if Russia were one big factory managed directly from one center, and of all the laborers received the goods they consumer directly, in kind.

"The Stalinist state is in the same position vis-a-vis the total labor time of Russian society as a factory owner vis-a-vis the labor of his employees. In other words, the division of labor is planned. But what is it that determines the actual division of the total labor time of Russian society? If Russia had not to compete with other countries, this division would be absolutely arbitrary. But as it is Stalinist decisions are based on factors outside its control, namely the world economy, world competition. From this point of view the Russian state is in a similar position to the owner of a single capitalist enterprise competing with other enterprises."<sup>7</sup>

Consistent with this reasoning, Cliff also argues that labor power in the Soviet economy is not a commodity.<sup>8</sup> Because the state is the only legal employer, the worker is not free in the double sense described by Marx as characteristic of capitalism. One sense is valid: workers are "free" of the means of production -- they do not own the machines they work with and have no other commodity to sell on the market but their capacity to labor, their labor power. But they are not free to change employers to get better wages or working conditions, because every enterprise is owned by the same state.

If Cliff were right then Soviet workers would not be proletarians in the Marxist sense. The proletariat is the class of producers who exchange their labor power for wages. Where labor power as a commodity doesn't exist neither can wages nor proletarians. Cliff doesn't draw this conclusion, for doing so would lead him into a real theoretical impasse: without a proletariat, the relations between rulers and producers cannot be capitalist even if accumulation is imposed from outside.

But it is not true. Under any form of capitalism the second "freedom" of the workers is illusory. "The period of time for which he is free to sell his labor power is the period of time for which he is forced to sell it," Marx wrote aptly.<sup>9</sup> Under capitalism a worker is free if he or she so chooses -- to starve. Soviet workers have as much freedom to dispose of their own labor power as any others: they can switch employers within the USSR and are often persuaded by competitive wages to do so.

Contrary to his own assertion, Cliff writes throughout as if the Soviet producers are proletarians, referring to their wages, rate of exploitation, etc. But he never explains why: he never, for example, claims that the externally imposed law of value forces internal capitalist relations on the Soviet economy. Nor could he, for once he has asserted that the Soviet workers are not "free" because they have only one choice of employer, no externally imposed laws can change that fact. Russian workers can't just switch to a foreign employer. The theory is caught in a major contradiction.

The mystery runs deeper, for in an earlier article Cliff attacked Shachtman's theory of bureaucratic collectivism for suggesting that the Soviet producers were not proletarians. Here it was the Shachtmanites who claimed the Soviet worker was not doubly "free," and it was Cliff who replied, "It is true that there often were legal impediments to the movement of Russian workers from one enterprise to another. But is this sufficient reason to say that the Russian worker was not a proletarian?" He answered negatively and concluded, "Above all, if Shachtman is right and there is no proletariat in the Stalinist regime, Marxism as a method, as a guide for the proletariat as the subject of historical change, becomes superfluous, meaningless."<sup>10</sup>

An accurate indictment not only of Shachtman but

of Cliff's own book. It demonstrates a criticism that we have previously made of Cliff's theory: that in reality it amounts to a bureaucratic collectivism analysis, not a capitalist one. Today, by the way, both article and book are in print. In one the Soviet workers are doubly free and therefore proletarian; in the other they are not doubly free but nevertheless proletarian. The contradiction within the book is thus compounded by another between the book and the article.

### Cliff's Theory Amended

As with Mandel, not only theory but also history challenges the Cliff conception of state capitalism. The devolution of Stalinist economies toward varieties of "market socialism" (which is not socialism at all but stratified capitalism with a market component) has undermined the conception that these societies are "single capitalist enterprises" without any internal laws of motion. As well, the history of uprisings



and revolutions in East Europe amply proves the proletarian character of the producing classes there. In particular, the Polish events of 1980-81 showed that labor power was very much a commodity and that workers could fight for better terms of exchange using proletarian methods like those in the West. It is likely for reasons like this that a (limited) theoretical rebellion occurred within the Cliff tendency.

An orthodox restatement of Cliff's theory in the SWP's journal<sup>11</sup> drew a concerned letter from party stalwart Duncan Hallas objecting to the formulation that "labor power cannot be a commodity in the USSR because with only one company (USSR Ltd) purchasing it there cannot be a genuine labor market there." Hallas argued:

"If labor power is not a commodity in the USSR, then there is no proletariat. Moreover, if labor power is not a commodity then there can be no wage labor/capital relationship and therefore no capital either. Therefore there can be no

capitalism in any shape or form."<sup>12</sup>

Entirely correct. Hallas even invoked the authority of Cliff's article against bureaucratic collectivism to bolster his case -- but he did not mention that Cliff's book, the Bible for the orthodox authors he was answering, said something quite different.

The latest installment in the Cliffite debate is provided by Alex Callinicos, who expands upon Hallas's point.<sup>13</sup> Callinicos argues not only that the existence of wage labor is necessary in a capitalist society but also that wage labor genuinely exists in the Soviet Union. But he goes no further. He does not draw the conclusion that if the producers are proletarians they must exchange their labor power for wages and in turn transfer value and add surplus-value to the goods they produce. Nor does he notice that these goods are in fact commodities, since they contain the value that the workers have given them and are produced for exchange among the different enter-

prises and ministries that make up the Soviet national economy (Callinicos does observe that these competitors compete for labor power). This would undermine Cliff's claim that the law of value is not generated internally in Russia. In brief, wage labor implies generalized commodity production, and Cliff is at least partially consistent when he denies both. In correcting him, Callinicos goes only half way.

In this he is not original. Granting the existence of wage labor while denying generalized commodity production is an old idea, developed by Stalin in his Economic Problems of Socialism in

the USSR and given theoretical weight by Mandel. The combination is not contradictory from a bourgeois empirical perspective, which simply notes (as do Stalin and Mandel) that the existence of wages is a "fact," as is supposedly the non-exchange of capital goods among Soviet firms. But for Marxists wage labor is more than just the fact of payment for labor; it is the sale of labor power as a special commodity whose use-value is to transfer existing value and add surplus-value to other commodities. That is why Marx could insist that "capital presupposes wage-labor."

The Marxist conception of wage labor not only refutes Stalin and Mandel; it also refutes Callinicos's attempt to surgically repair Cliff's theory by substituting wage labor as the mode of exploitation. It is necessary also to remove Cliff's idea that the law of value is not internally generated in the USSR. Callinicos does not do this; instead he notes politely that Cliff's "framework" is still the basis for

analyzing state capitalism. But in reality Callinicos's point makes Cliff's framework collapse.

### Cliff on the Workers' State

The Callinicos amendment to Cliff's theory has further problems. Cliff makes much of the fact that Stalin decreed in 1943 that the law of value applied in the USSR. He takes this as a recognition of reality, and argues that the existence of the law of value means the USSR is capitalist. But this is wrong. A workers' state also operates under the law of value, since the laws of capitalism cannot be abolished overnight by the transitional society, any more than the state can be abolished. A workers' state as backward and isolated as the early Soviet Union would necessarily have been under the constant threat of domination by the law of value and, by itself, could only have taken the most limited steps to combat it. Thus in the theoretical debates of the 1920s, all sides recognized (in different ways) the critical role of the law of value in the Soviet economy. Stalin's 1943 pronouncement was significant, but not because it proved the USSR was capitalist. It simply ended the pretensions of the 1930s that Soviet "socialism" had done away with the law of value.

Cliff ignores both Marxist theory and the general Bolshevik opinion of the 1920s in insisting that the early USSR was non-capitalist because the law of value did not apply. He does this by citing Marx: "in the communist society ... as it has emerged from capitalist society" exchange is governed not by the law of value but by conscious planning.<sup>14</sup>

Marx, however, was referring to something quite different from the early Soviet state -- communist society, not the workers' state transitional to it.<sup>15</sup> Cliff idealizes the workers' state, painting it as if it were full-fledged socialism (the first stage of classless communism): exchange, he claims, is carried out "through the conscious direction of the economy and not through the action of blind forces." This misrepresentation enables him to affirm that Stalin restored capitalism by re-establishing the law of value from outside in 1928, when the mad drive for accumulating capital at the expense of the workers and peasants began. He does not see at all that a workers' state, especially an industrially backward one, must accumulate capital in order to survive. The failure to recognize this means that Cliff's theory is not Trotskyist but Bukharinist, in the sense that it points to a peasant-based transition to socialism through industrialization "at a snail's pace." This view amounted to an open invitation to imperialist repenetration of the USSR.

There is a logical link among three central points of Cliff's theory: his analysis of state capitalism without wage labor, his idealization of the workers' state, and his position that the capitalist counterrevolution took place under foreign pressure in 1928. Callinicos, having abandoned the first point, ought to go on to reconsider the others, but

he does not. Like Mandel, the Cliffite reformers cannot extract the full value of their criticism without endangering the structure of their entire theoretical world view.

### The Mandel-Cliff Parallel

The 1928 date for the counterrevolution leads to an inverted similarity between Cliff and Mandel. But first we note that it makes little sense. The Stalinist system didn't stabilize until the mid-1930s, and the new non-Bolshevik Communist Party wasn't consolidated until the 1936-38 purges. By 1939 the counterrevolution was complete and the ruling class had consolidated its power and established its continuity.

Secondly, dating the counterrevolution at 1928 means that the great Soviet industrial build-up of the 1930s is credited to a capitalist state. Against



*Stalin and lackeys, 1934. By 1939, totalitarian counterrevolution had decentralized and destroyed workers' state created in 1917.*

this, we agree with Trotsky that the raising of the USSR to second rank among industrial powers was an achievement, despite its bloodiness, that only a workers' state could carry out. None of the other Stalinist states has been able to accomplish anything parallel because they never were workers' states to begin with. Moreover, as we noted earlier, in the recent period Soviet industrialization and growth has barely kept up with that of the West.<sup>16</sup>

It was only the workers' revolution to end private ownership and centralize Russian economy that made possible the huge leap forward. Cliff's impatient timetable for the counterrevolution allows the Stalinist bureaucracy -- for him, an already full-fledged bourgeoisie -- to play a progressive historical role. This matches the idea that the Stalinists could spread the socialist revolution after World War II, creating new workers' states by smashing working-



class actions and organizations. In this way Mandel and other "deformed workers' staters" also see the bureaucracy as historically progressive.

### The Primacy of Competition

This similarity can be accounted for. Cliff and Mandel share (with Shachtman) important theoretical assumptions: that there is no competition within the Soviet economy, and more fundamentally, that competition is the driving force of capitalist accumulation. For Mandel the absence of competition is what proves to him that the USSR is not capitalist; for Cliff and Callinicos, the competitive military pressure from outside is what makes Russia capitalist.

Primacy of competition was certainly not Marx's interpretation of capitalism.<sup>17</sup> It is rather the standard outlook of the petty bourgeois who sees his competition with a rival shopkeeper down the block as the essential determinant of his economic well-being, and who cannot possibly grasp the deeper forces driving him to accumulate. Marx in Capital studied the commodity and all the other characteristics of capitalism by scrupulously stripping away their fetishistic disguises in order to expose the system's essence, the capital-labor relationship. Rather than seeing relations within the ruling class as crucial, Marx put the stress on the struggle between classes in production. The bourgeoisie's need to dominate the working class, to drive living labor out of production and replace it with "dead labor," is what forces capital to accumulate.

By focusing on competition, Cliff and Mandel both overlook this essence and therefore the crucial role of the proletariat in capitalism's dynamic. And by stressing competition's absence in the USSR, they avoid seeing that the class struggle over labor power is the determining factor in the Soviet system. Now, when the proletariat is the only progressive class and the bureaucracy is a fetter on the advance of the productive forces, they still credit Soviet gains to the Stalinists: Cliff via foreign military pressure, Mandel via their consumption desires.

The most popular theoretical currents descending from Trotskyism have abandoned the Marxist view of the proletarian struggle as the motive force of capitalism. This is a consequence of the massive defeat of the working class by Stalinist counterrevolution in the World War II period. The theoretical retreat reflects these tendencies' political adaptation to middle-class and labor-aristocratic social layers, a process chronicled in every issue of this magazine.

The reformed theories might still be steps forward if they represented attempts at a political turn to the left. But this is probably not the case. We have already drawn out some of the conservative consequences of Mandel's new twist based on his apparent discovery of virtues in competition. His United Secretariat has certainly been moving rightward, well before Mandel's innovations. In the case of the Cliff tendency there is no sign that the Hallas-Callinicos

position has been adopted; but that would not help push their politics to the left unless its full implications were worked through -- which has not been done. In sum, the revised theories are not intended as tools for coming to grips with proletarian politics; instead, they serve only as illusory covers over the yawning gap between past theory and reality made all too obvious by the recent acts of the proletariat under Stalinism. Let the buyer beware.

### Footnotes

1. Page 562.
2. "Marx and Engels on Commodity Production and Bureaucracy," in Rethinking Marxism, edited by Resnick and Wolff, 1985; pages 240-41.
3. From his 1969 pamphlet against the Cliff group, The Inconsistencies of State Capitalism, page 14.
4. In another article Mandel seems to apply this "stomach-driven conception to capitalism in general. For he writes: "An economy governed by the law of value is an economy in which production, and therefore investment, is guided by effective demand. What operates here is not so much the difference in the intensity of different needs of individuals; what is decisive is the difference in incomes. Thus production is directed toward satisfying the needs of the privileged layers first. Production of luxury items is stimulated before the elementary needs of the mass of the population are met." ("Economics of the Transition Period," in 50 Years of World Revolution, edited by Mandel.) Mandel is arguing that production is determined by consumer demand (for luxuries), as opposed to even the demand for means of production. This entirely un-Marxist analysis was refuted in Socialist Voice No. 2, page 29.
5. "Marx and Engels on Commodity Production and Bureaucracy," op.cit., pages 241-2.
6. ibid., page 239.
7. Russia: A Marxist Analysis, page 159.
8. ibid., page 158.
9. Capital, Volume I, Chapter 10, Section 7.
10. "The Theory of Bureaucratic Collectivism: a Critique," in International Socialism No. 32.
11. "New theories of eastern European class societies," by Peter Binns and Mike Haynes, in International Socialism, 2:7.
12. International Socialism, 2:9, page 129.
13. "Wage Labor and State Capitalism: a reply to Peter Binns and Mike Haynes," in International Socialism, 2:12.
14. Russia: A Marxist Analysis, pages 91 and 98.
15. Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Program," I:3. We have previously refuted other distorters of this very point -- Mandel in Socialist Voice No.2, page 27, and the ex-Cliffite British Workers Power group in No.20, pages 22-23.
16. This whole point is elaborated in Socialist Voice No.5, pages 27-29.
17. See Socialist Voice No.4, pages 19-20.

# South Africa

*continued from page 2*

revolt the liberals feared is now taking place.

Apartheid exists to enforce capitalist rule and enrich its profits. But the rate of profit on South African investments, 20 percent a decade ago, is now down to 5 percent. In the last year and a half \$2 billion of capital flowed out of the country; brokers are referring to a "bloodbath" on the stock exchange. Indeed, the "moral" pressure for divestment and sanctions is a convenient cover for the most self-interested capitalist motives: getting your money out while the getting is good.

United States capital is not the heaviest foreign investor in South Africa but it is among the top. And as the leader of world capitalism it plays a strategic role. The U.S. has to take into account political variables like relations with blacks at home, unrest in the "third world" and the cold war. Reluctantly, it sees the need to destabilize the Botha regime (to some degree) to preserve the stability of imperialism overall. If Reagan had held to his unreconstructed "constructive engagement" policy, not only would the U.S. have decisively lost a propaganda battle with Russia, but economic rivals in West Europe and Japan would gain an advantage in dealing with future South African leaders.

A key factor Washington has to consider was voiced by "African socialist" President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia at the United Nations. Showing his awareness that a mass revolution in South Africa could bring down capitalist black governments as well, the pessimistic Kaunda stated: "A catastrophic explosion which will engulf us all in the region is imminent. ... Sanctions are a better of two evils. If you don't apply sanctions, hundreds of thousands of people will die and the investments will go up in flames. With sanctions there is a possibility of recovery."<sup>5</sup>

Shultz has echoed Kaunda's warning, and the liberals are even more frightened. And despite Reagan's obvious preference for bloody repression and the status quo, he had to decree limited sanctions and allow his State Department to call on Botha to negotiate with the banned ANC he once labeled "terrorist" and free its imprisoned leader, Nelson Mandela.

Today the objective of both conservative and liberal imperialists is the same: an orderly reform of apartheid to dapple the South African government and power structure with enough black faces through some form of "power sharing" so that the unrest will cease and business can resume operating at a profit. Gavin Relly, head of the Anglo American Corporation which owns half the shares on the South African stock market, led the business delegation that met with the ANC in Zambia. He summed up the discussion:

"Our positions are very far apart. But as South Africans we are all interested to create a more

cohesive society and a more equitable one. The real common ground is that we are concerned that the next generation should inherit a viable political and economic system."

Thus the more far-seeing capitalists are looking towards a deal which will jettison apartheid as such in order to preserve private property. The economic crisis that has hit South Africa, linked to the world crisis that followed the post-war prosperity bubble, has sharpened apartheid's contradictions. Skilled workers are increasingly necessary and in short supply, given the miserable education and living conditions afforded to blacks and the limits placed on their social mobility; the small white population provides too limited a market for South Africa's industrial products; the cost of the repressive apparatus is rising; even the incidental expenses of apartheid like segregated transport, bathrooms and cafeterias take their toll. Bringing it all to a head is the rebellion of the black masses, which itself has been accelerated by the economic crisis: black unemployment is estimated at 3 million out of a population of 25 million, an increase of two-thirds from a year ago.

For the first time since it took power in 1948, the reactionary Nationalist Party regime is grudgingly recognizing that the structure of apartheid must be overhauled. Even in his hard-line speech last August, Botha spoke of the need for talks with suitable black leaders. More recently he offered to restore some form of citizenship to blacks. But his proposals are too little and too late.

The chief dispute today between conservatives and liberals is that the liberals believe Botha has outlived his usefulness; he must be tossed aside in favor of elements willing to compromise with the black middle classes. The Reaganites, on the other hand, fear that Botha's fall would lead to too radical a solution, demoralizing middle-class whites and the army which stands as a bulwark against revolt -- in short, would permit the already dangerous situation to get out of hand. This is the characteristic debate within any ruling class whenever a revolt of the oppressed gets under way.

## Politics of the Movement Leaders

The liberals who have captured the leadership of the U.S. anti-apartheid movement paint the conflict between moderate Democrats and Reagan Republicans as a moral crusade for black self-determination in South Africa. As we have seen, this is far from the truth. The political aims of these anti-apartheid misleaders -- support for the moderate bourgeois option -- are disastrous for the mass struggle, despite the good intentions of many of their followers among students, the intelligentsia and black people in general.

A central task for proletarian communists is to warn the anti-apartheid forces here and, above all, the fighting black workers and students of South Africa against both the liberal carrot and the conservative stick. Both imperialist strategies are de-

terminated to crush the masses' wish to choose their own destiny. By fervently embracing the ANC and by spearheading their own activities with the program of sanctions and divestment, they are betraying their followers and the masses who look to them for support in South Africa.

To demonstrate our point we look at the words of the black civil rights leaders most closely identified with the anti-apartheid cause. In a recent interview, civil rights liberals like Mayor Andrew Young of Atlanta, Rev. Joseph Lowery of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Benjamin Hooks of the NAACP all hailed the negotiations with the ANC initiated by the capitalists. "I think that's the beginning of the end, I really do," said Lowery. Added Hooks, comparing South Africa today with the 1955 Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott: "Were it left to the business community, it would be over early. It's the government that maintains the policy."<sup>6</sup>

The civil rights liberals, like Kaunda, like Reagan and Shultz, couple their divestment/sanctions strategy with a salute to the "forward-looking" bourgeoisie. All accept capitalism as beneficial in the situation -- the same capitalism that has squeezed the blood of its black slaves through apartheid for decades! That is the true meaning of the policy endorsed by even the left anti-apartheid leaders when they cheerlead for the ANC. It is a strategy to build the ANC's stature in South Africa too, to ensure that a power-sharing deal to save capitalism goes through.

### The ANC's Program

The banned ANC, guerrilla army and all, is indeed capitalism's best hope. As Jesse Jackson, the leading American civil rights politician said recently, "Those business leaders defied Botha to meet with the ANC. They went because they know where their economic future is, and it's not with Botha's apartheid government."<sup>7</sup> Likewise, Anglo American's Rely was not wrong to speak of his "common ground" with the ANC. As Mandela noted in his speech at the Rivonia trial in 1964 that sent him to jail, a speech widely touted by the ANC and its supporters today: "The ANC has never at any period of its history advocated a revolutionary change in the economic structure of the country, nor has it, to the best of my recollection, ever condemned capitalist society."

And although the ANC calls for nationalization of the big monopoly firms, the bourgeoisie knows that this would not be so bad: other black-ruled African countries let their old management continue to manage, invest and profit. The pro-business Economist magazine writes of Oliver Tambo, the ANC's leader in exile, that he "uses the left-wing talk common in nationalist circles, but his real attitude seems emphatically middle-class and Christian."<sup>8</sup>

A recent position of the ANC illuminates its pro-capitalist attitude. In September, while Botha's finance minister was visiting the U.S. to round up funds to save South Africa's desperate financial

situation, the ANC addressed "the people" of the United States as follows: "We appeal to you all to demand that American banks should insist that apartheid be made to pay up the \$11.1 billion that it owes. Write or telephone to America's top ten banks and the Federal Reserve Bank and let them know your will."<sup>9</sup>

This call is really addressed to the banks. And if the banks were to act as desired and if apartheid were actually to pay up, the billions would have to be squeezed out of the hides of South Africa's workers -- these interest payments are one form of the bloated profits generated by the super-exploitation



*Thousands march in London against apartheid. Despite liberal misleaders who boost ANC, Azanian masses will themselves choose leaders.*

of black labor drained by imperialism. A new, more vicious round of repression against the already seething masses would result, which would hardly mesh with the bankers' fear that the present clashes will escalate into a vast class explosion.

### Repudiate the Imperialist Debt!

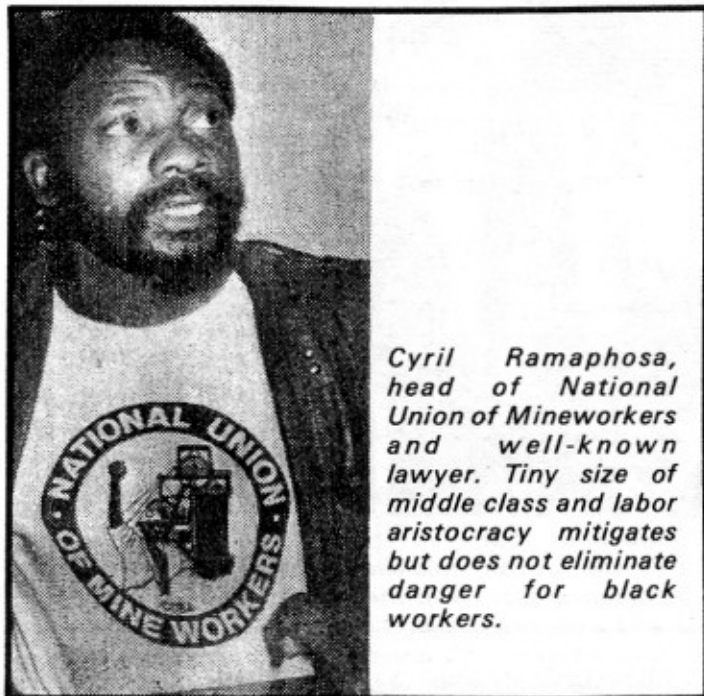
Rather than insisting that the imperialist banks be pressured to collect their pound of flesh, any leadership with anti-capitalist guts would push for workers to expropriate the banks and cancel the debt. In contrast, the ANC statement serves to announce that it will undertake to pay off South Africa's debt religiously once it takes up the reins of government. Such cooperation with imperialism -- the opposite of the Bolsheviks' repudiation of the Czarist debt -- would not be unprecedented; paying off Somoza's bills

is currently the disastrous policy of the Sandinista government of Nicaragua.

### A Democratic Alternative

The "power-sharing" the ANC is maneuvering towards does not mean democracy. It might resemble the Zimbabwe solution of guaranteeing whites a fixed share in the government including decisive ministries; or it might amount to dividing South Africa among its races and tribes in such a way that whites and cooperative blacks like the dangerous thugmaster Gatsha Buthelezi, hereditary leader of the Zulus, wielded a workable veto. Neither compromise would satisfy the black masses for long.

What about "one-person-one-vote" and full political rights for all in an undivided South Africa? That is the program of the ANC and of some U.S. liberals, but democracy is the one solution that is excluded. Apartheid is the alternative to the pacification tool which imperialism uses elsewhere: a stable middle class and labor aristocracy. As Leon Trotsky once



*Cyril Ramaphosa, head of National Union of Mineworkers and well-known lawyer. Tiny size of middle class and labor aristocracy mitigates but does not eliminate danger for black workers.*

pointed out, democracy is a luxury of the imperialist countries benefiting from surplus-value extracted from exploited workers in the colonies; only with a large section sharing a stake in the system can the masses at home be allowed to vote on the crucial question of which wing of the bourgeoisie wields public power.

In South Africa there is only the tiniest black labor aristocracy, the result of apartheid's making the white working class the rulers' dependents and allies. Nor is there a large black middle class as in the U.S.; the system has too few Wilson Goodes able to repress the masses of their own race in the name of democracy. No in-between solution is possible: it will be either an absolute commitment to capitalism ("for now"), requiring an iron repression against the

vast, surging proletariat, or socialist revolution. The black leaders who accept a "power-sharing" role would have to agree not just to pacify the masses but to suppress them as necessary. "Democracy" in any real sense would be incredibly unstable and would endanger the black leaders' repressive task.

### The Black Organizations

With democracy excluded and the bourgeoisie's power-sharing schemes disastrous for blacks, it is crucial to consider the programs of the other black liberation organizations. In the U.S., however, even hearing them requires bucking the leadership of the solidarity movement. The ANC is normally the only South African group invited to speak on campuses and at conferences, a policy it enforces by refusing to speak if any of its rivals do. It also adheres to the contemptible Stalinist practice of spreading rumors and "hints" about the associations, passports and funds of rival black South African organizations.

Although support for the ANC in South Africa is indeed widespread, there is not the hegemony its leaders claim. For example, Denis MacShane, a British journalist visiting South Africa for the International Metalworkers Federation, quoted one local union activist as follows:

"We long for the day when Nelson Mandela is our Prime Minister in a majority-rule South Africa, but when that day comes we want an independent trade union movement so that workers don't get kicked around."<sup>10</sup>

The only guarantee for this well-justified sentiment would be an authentic communist working-class party to contest the ANC for the leadership of the liberation struggle. Unfortunately, despite the activity of professed Trotskyists and other left tendencies in the existing organizations, we do not know of any effort as yet toward such an independent revolutionary class party. We briefly outline here the major organizations seeking the leadership of the working class.

The ANC itself contains several tendencies. Predominant are the liberal wing represented by Tambo and the Stalinist wing of the South African Communist Party, which is influential in the ANC's exiled labor arm, the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). Both agree on the ANC's program of non-racist capitalism for the present, leaving talk of socialism for the indefinite future in the standard Stalinist way.

A lesser-known wing is the "Trotskyist" Marxist Workers' Tendency, which has ties to the Militant Tendency within the British Labour Party. Expelled from the ANC last summer, the MWT argues that if the ANC should gain power, even with its pro-bourgeois ideology it would be forced to create a "workers' state." This is the classical Pabloist "entryist" reasoning that led the Trotskyist parties after World War II down the road to burial within social democratic and Stalinist movements, and helped bring the

Fourth International to an end in the early 1950s. Accordingly, the MWT concentrates its efforts on the vain task of building a working-class party within the middle-class ANC.

The main political rivals to the ANC are the black nationalist organizations which rule out white participation in the South African revolution. One of these, the Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO), labels itself a working-class organization, although it finds its base mainly among intellectuals and the petty bourgeoisie. It does so on the false grounds that all blacks under South African conditions are working-class. Judging by the few issues of its press we have seen and a talk given by a spokesman visiting the U.S. last spring, AZAPO is also a multi-tendency organization containing several "Marxist" trends as well as less well-defined currents.

AZAPO gained international attention last year by leading protests against touring U.S. Senator Ted Kennedy, against the wishes of the ANC and its allies, the United Democratic Front and Nobel prizewinner Bishop Desmond Tutu. AZAPO justly condemned Kennedy as a capitalist and liberal imperialist. But while it recognizes the ANC's capitulation to white liberals and capitalists, AZAPO assumes that black nationalism is an answer. The "socialism" it puts forward is only a radical version of the nationalistic "socialisms" which have nowhere broken with imperialism in any fundamental way.

The aim of an authentically socialist working-class party has to be internationalist and interracialist in its world view, despite the immediate unlikelihood of winning numbers of whites in South Africa today to support the goal of an Azanian workers' state. No national economy can go it alone in this imperial epoch, not even wealthy South Africa, not even the USA. The only choices are submission to the capitalist world market (which is why the ANC chooses to collaborate) or the overthrow of capitalism internationally, which requires links with the predominantly white working classes of Europe and North America. A giant step forward would be the Azanian workers' revolution and its spread throughout Southern Africa, overthrowing the Kaundas and other nationalists who prop up world imperialism.

### The Black Unions

There are genuine mass working-class organizations in South Africa: the overwhelmingly black "non-racial" unions that have grown powerfully in recent years. They now have around a million members, as high a proportion of the work force as do U.S. unions today, and they are growing and dynamic. Some of the union-building strikes have been awe-inspiring. When the gold miners first organized and faced company demands to know who their leaders were, obviously to be fired and in all likelihood beaten, they all stepped forward; U.S. journalists reported that the bosses were never able to find out who the actual leaders were. With class solidarity of that order it

is no wonder the union movement escalated so rapidly.

Many of the unions are organized into several national federations; this fall a new unification move is scheduled, led by the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) and the National Union of Mine-workers (NUM), the strongest section of another federation, the Council of Unions of South Africa (CASU). Not joining in this new federation will be the unions affiliated to the United Democratic Front, as well as a smaller number of black consciousness unions of which some are linked to AZAPO. FOSATU and CUSA led the November stayaway in alliance with UDF-affiliated community and student leaders.

Despite their massive growth and significant strikes, the unions have not kept pace with the need for black political leadership against the apartheid state and the capitalist class as a whole. The NUM's leader Cyril Ramaphosa is a lawyer by profession who seems to have become a labor hero of the international left. MacShane cites him as one a "group of organizationally experienced and politically mature black South Africans who could provide much of the leadership in a majority-rule South Africa." Even the left-talking Spartacist tendency treated Ramaphosa the way it apologized for Arthur Scargill in the British miners' strike: "Typically the union leaders [like Ramaphosa] are young men ... They are not like the completely housebroken and craven pro-capitalist labor bureaucrats most of us despise in this country."<sup>11</sup>

But look how Ramaphosa handled a critical strike this past September, a strike he couldn't avoid calling because militants had fought for it. As the deadline approached, he first settled with Anglo American, the employer of the majority of his union's membership and the first company to recognize his union, and thereby withdrew this powerful force from strike action. Then he threatened to call out all NUM members in solidarity, including those at Anglo American, if any employers used violence or intimidation against miners.

But on the eve of the now-weakened strike he withdrew this threat and announced in advance that the strike was doomed to fail because of the bosses' severe repression -- whereas widening the strike would have been the only way to ward off the intimidation. A labor expert supportive of Ramaphosa told reporter Sheila Rule: "He said last week that if the mine owners used harsh tactics, which they did, he would call a solidarity strike of his members. He did not do that because he did not want to ruin his relationship with Anglo American ... So he has used pragmatism, taken his lumps, cut his losses and is preparing for next year or the next."<sup>12</sup>

The real lumps and losses were taken by miners who lost jobs and wages while their leader was maneuvering to stay in the bosses' good graces. This sort of betrayal is precisely typical of bureaucrats who use their power and leadership to defend the interests of a narrow layer of workers against that of the working class as a whole -- in this case

against those of the NUM membership as a whole.

A victory for the mineworkers at this crucial point could have given decisive leadership to the working class in the anti-apartheid struggle; it would have cut the ground out from under the bosses' hopes for a compromise deal with the ANC and other middle-class leaderships. Certainly the NUM leadership was aware of the political importance of the strike: in the current climate it had to add demands for ending the state of emergency and withdrawing threats to repatriate foreign black workers to its normal economic claims. But Ramaphosa sacrificed the strike for pro-capitalist reasons.

Ramaphosa's defeatist strategy was not due simply to his concern for Anglo American. A winning strike could not have remained confined to the mining industry: a fight against the gold producers central to the South African economy would have drawn the working class as a whole into the vortex. The general strike so central to the proletarian communist program would have had a steamroller impact, demonstrating that workers' industrial power is the key to liberation. The youths' hit-and-run tactics against the police, the product of just anger and ample frustration, would have found a powerful center to rally around. Even the youths' demand for guns would have been escalated if the unions had come forward as the base for armed self-defense organizations. In sum, a general or even an extended strike would have placed the proletariat as a class at the heart of the struggle, not merely part of the mass.

The labor and middle-class leaders were not anxious for a development that would bring together the economic and political struggles and raise the question of working-class revolution. What then would have come of Ramaphosa and the ANC's deals with Relly & Co.? Power-sharing would have been proved an illusion. The workers have to draw the lesson and forge a revolutionary leadership in the place of the "politically mature" and "un-housebroken" leaders they have.

### South African Strategy Debate

The primary task remains the construction of a revolutionary proletarian party. The union leaderships are playing a negative role toward this end, even though they have to reflect the militant class aims of the workers. FOSATU's General Secretary Joe Foster stated his union's position in an important and controversial speech at the Federation's 1982 conference:

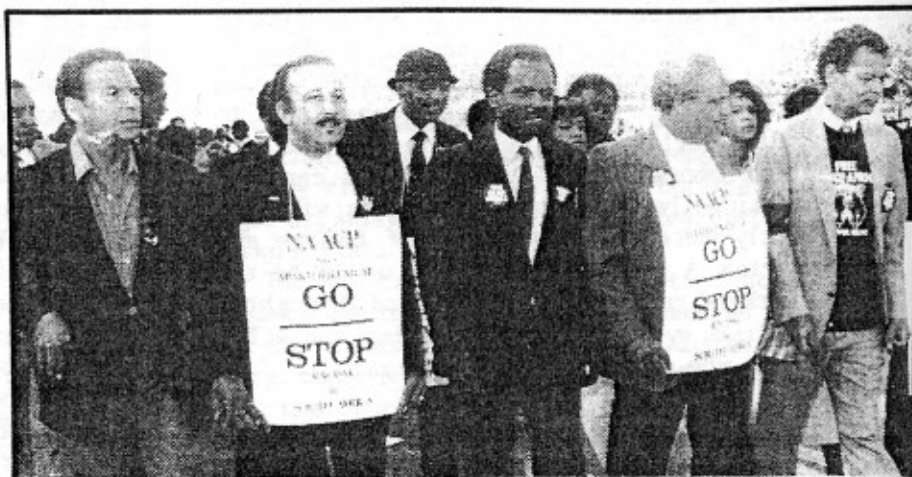
"All the great and successful popular movements have had as their aim the overthrow of oppressive — most often colonial — regimes. But these movements cannot and have not in themselves been able to deal with the particular and fundamental prob-

lems of workers. Their task is to remove regimes that are regarded as illegitimate and unacceptable by the majority.

"It is therefore essential that workers must strive to build their own powerful and effective organization even whilst they are part of the wider popular struggle. This organization is necessary to protect and further workers interests and to ensure that the popular movement is not hijacked by elements who will in the end have no option but to turn against their worker supporters."<sup>11</sup>

Very true, but hardly specific enough. The sort of organization that could hijack the struggle is the ANC; the reason it "will have no option" but to do so is that it is bourgeois, representative of an enemy class. These things have to be said sharp and clear if the working class is to be forewarned and to know just how to support the bourgeois groups in struggle against the regime — through a military and technical bloc and with no political support.

Similarly, FOSATU's President Chris Dlamini, after a visit to neighboring Zimbabwe, observed that although some people in Zimbabwe were liberated, workers were not. "Worker liberation can only be achieved by a strong, well organized worker movement," he said, as quoted by MacShane, Plaut and Ward. The reporters note the vagueness of this statement and provide the South African Communist Party's response. The SACP charged FOSATU with syndicalism and added: "Dare [FOSATU] ignore the confusion and division it will sow in the ranks of the working class if



*Integrationist leaders Young, Hooks and Bond lead anti-apartheid march in Atlanta. They laud South African "business community" — hyenas who gorge themselves on super-exploited black labor.*

it sets up a new 'workers movement' in competition with or alongside the still living Communist Party."<sup>12</sup>

The SACP apparently likes to demand hegemony within the working class as its due, just as the ANC does in the liberation movement as a whole. Such arrogance is perfectly fitting; it reflects a typically Stalinist attitude towards the workers. Just what kind of

"protection" the SACP would permit the workers if it had the chance can be seen not only in the anti-worker regimes it supports in Eastern Europe but above all by the Communist Parties' subordination of the workers everywhere in the interests of capital.

syndicalism. The SACP and its supporters can easily challenge them for not emphasizing that working class organization in South Africa must aim at seizing state power. It is a tragedy that the leading working class figures in this massive struggle leave this



*Unarmed young black militants defy bloody attacks by Botha regime. Phony sanctions, stock-swapping and pacifist moralizing won't help; guns and a strategy for socialist revolution will.*

Faced with conscious and determined working-class traitors such as these, FOSATU's apparent strategy of building a "workers' movement" in union form is a dead-end. It calls to mind the woeful limitations of Polish Solidarnosc in 1981; the leaders of that movement held back the workers' militancy in the vain hope of striking a deal with the regime and refused to declare it an oppositional claimant for state power. To FOSATU's credit, it supported the Solidarnosc workers against repression from the "socialist" Polish regime, but it too seeks to be a radical bargaining agent for workers rather than the spark for a revolutionary alternative to capitalism.

The unions are necessary working-class institutions, but so is a revolutionary party. Such a party would embrace all the most advanced working people and would promote a conscious proletarian socialist ideology to counter the ANC's and SACP's "all-class" bourgeois strategy. Also necessary are class-wide actions like the general strike that can unite all working-class people -- from all unions, employed and unemployed, unionized or not -- and show the entire class its true role and strength.

Their failure to draw the wider political lessons leaves the FOSATU leaders wide open to the charge of

question to middle-class organizations or to Stalinists who would take power in the workers' name only, leaving it in reality with the nationalist bourgeoisie. The construction of a revolutionary proletarian leadership is the absolutely primary task facing the South African black workers today.

#### Footnotes

1. New York Times, October 3.
2. New York Times, September 10.
3. New York Times, October 3.
4. See Socialist Voice No. 4, Summer 1977, pages 14-15, for our accurately predictive analysis made at the time.
5. New York Times, October 23.
6. New York Times, October 25.
7. New York Times, November 3.
8. September 14.
9. Workers World, September 19.
10. Peace and Democracy News, Summer-Fall 1985.
11. Workers Vanguard, September 6.
12. New York Times, September 6.
13. Reprinted in the book on the South African black workers Power!, by MacShane, Plaut and Ward.
14. African Communist, No. 83, 1983.

# Communist Work in the Trade Unions

We print below, followed by our own commentary, major excerpts of several documents sent to us last fall by the International Communist League (IKL) of Austria. The first document is a proposal written jointly by the IKL and the Group of Oppositional Workers (GOA) at the General Motors Austria Works, a group that IKL supporters participate in. The proposal was written for an international meeting of GM "rank and file" groups held in Amsterdam in September, 1984.

The second document, "Trade Union Resistance Struggle and Political Organization," is by the IKL alone. It explains the IKL's conception of its work as a communist organization in oppositional rank and file groups. Finally we print two paragraphs of self-description by the GOA, taken from its "Proposal for an Electoral Platform" distributed to General Motors workers and also submitted to the Amsterdam conference as a concretization of the ideas in the joint IKL/GOA document. (The translations of these documents are by the LRP; emphasis is as in the originals.)

The LRP commentary is a critique of the method of communist work in the trade unions illustrated by all three documents.

## TO THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL MEETING OF GENERAL MOTORS RANK AND FILE GROUPS (A Joint Discussion Proposal by GOA and the IKL)

### The Condition of the Automobile Industry

The automobile industry is one of the most important branches of industry in the imperialist world. In late 1979 it, like the whole capitalist system, was shaken by an all-out crisis. At first the weakest U.S. auto firms were affected; later (in 1980) many European producers were included too. In the meantime Chrysler had abandoned and sold all of its international production plants. The European buyer, Peugeot, however, was itself not in good shape; it too was floundering. It undertook a ruthless reorganization plan for Talbot. A similar treatment was given to British Leyland, and other producers also made constant staff reductions. Since the late 1970s more than 1.5 million auto workers worldwide have lost their jobs, despite the slight boom since 1982.

Within the automobile industry a relentless competitive struggle for survival is taking place. This struggle between firms is being carried out on the backs of the working class. It has resulted in mass unemployment, reduction of living standards and the pauperization of whole regions, especially in the third world.

The Japanese automobile industry is a threat to its European and North American competitors precisely because of its high technological level. So they try to catch up to Japan. This development necessarily

leads some firms which can't keep up with their rivals to fall out of the race. But this means more hundreds of thousands of auto workers without jobs.

The workers will not take this without a fight. A whole series of auto strikes proves this: for example, in Belgian Ford in 1968, supported by Ford workers in West Germany, Britain and the USA; or the British Ford strike in 1971 and the 1975 struggle of GM workers in Mexico (also with international support); likewise in 1977. In 1976 the Strasbourg [France] GM workers went on strike for three weeks; a year later there was a strike at Antwerp GM; and the latest example is the five-week, bitter strike of the French Talbot workers. These are only a few examples.

But most of the struggles ended in defeat. Although there was international financial and moral support in some cases, the struggles remained isolated and couldn't put up effective resistance against the bosses. This is reason enough to meet here.

### What Are the GM Bosses' Goals?

In 1979 GM announced the biggest investment program ever undertaken by one company in the history of capitalism. From 1980 to 1984, 16 billion German marks [about \$6 billion] were invested, mainly in Western Europe, to construct new production plants and modernize old ones. Further, the company plans to invest 4.7 billion marks [about \$1.8 billion] more in Europe. This offensive is primarily aimed at pushing back its rival, Ford, in Europe.

Unlike Ford, which hitherto has had 44% of its sales in foreign countries, GM traditionally concentrated on the internal American market, which took 80% of its sales. Because of the advance of the Japanese and German auto industries in the late 1970s, competition on the American market became ever sharper, above all between Ford and GM. In the USA in 1980-81 Ford was seriously thrown back, and in 1982 it nearly faced a life-and-death crisis. GM was the victor in this battle and now wishes to seize Ford's last domain, Western Europe, through an enormous extension of production.

GM now wants to produce "world cars." This means that the international division of labor will move to a qualitatively new level. A more profitable cost-per-unit mass production is being sought via unification of planning and development as well as via standardization and rationalization of production. The only driving force is to achieve super-profits.

The reduction of the number of vehicle types and the international splitting up of engine, gear and component plants -- as well as of assembly locations and research centers -- raised the mutual interdependence of the various individual units. Simultaneously, this led in recent years to a progressive centralization of management. Already in 1974 GM had created a common planning center for the coordination of de-



velopment work for its five American branches. This strengthened centralization also made it possible for GM's management to play off the work force of one branch against another through computerized control to a previously unanticipated degree.

It is clear that nationally limited workers' struggles will be defeated with increasing ease. If, for example, a British auto plant is struck, it allows the identical type of car or at least its basic components to be imported from other production plants in other countries.

Today each investment is determined according to a firm's worldwide strategy, whereby the most profit-

more jobs are squeezing higher productivity out of us. Along with increasing physical and psychological exhaustion there is the decrease of our real wages. The rising cost of living, taxation and often credit rates depresses our standard of living. Working conditions of women are especially intolerable, from their even lower wages through chauvinistic hostility to sexual harassment. On top of this, after work they face the undivided burden of housework.

### How to Organize Resistance

Even if we wish only to hold on to our present living standards, we must fight. Only workers' direct action (strikes, demonstrations, sit-ins, boycotts, building of strike and factory committees, etc.) can thwart the plans of the capitalist managers. Since the bosses are on the offensive we must first of all organize our defense. So how we do this is a question of our survival.

Our highest goal should be to organize a common struggle above all political differences, above all differences of race, sex, age, etc. National borders must be no barrier for us GM workers. If we are able to take steps in the direction of this sought-for workers' united front, that would be a greater success. What is decisive for us GM workers is to achieve the greatest possible mobilization for our immediate interests.

The preconditions for such a common struggle are, nevertheless, common goals. Our common immediate interests must be assembled in an international Action Program. This has to be worked out jointly by the groups participating in the GM Conference. In order to give a perspective for a common struggle which goes beyond our common immediate interests, political discussions are necessary. So we consider it to be the right and duty of each political current within the workers' movement to introduce its political views and proposals. In this way a comradely criticism of other currents could only be constructive.

All militant co-workers should join together around such an international Action Program. The success of even local conflicts depends increasingly on the international coordination of workers. Otherwise, one work force after another will be defeated, one workplace will be played against another, by GM's internationally alert management. Therefore we should take the first steps towards preventing the future isolation of individual workplaces. It is increasingly necessary to organize an international fighting trade union opposition around the international Action Program, so as to place it before all GM workers and win them to it.

### Elements of an International Action Program

We believe that the following considerations and demands should be the main points for an international action program for the fightback at GM, since they deal with the immediately threatening dangers. It goes without saying that we regard these points



*Spanish communist worker with homemade hammer and sickle. Workers must create a new vanguard, not a new rank and file.*

able conditions of exploitation on the international level are used. This means, for example, locating labor intensive production in countries with a low wage level, above all the developing countries or the EEC's backyard (Turkey, Greece), while capital intensive production is situated in countries with correspondingly qualified work forces and lower strike rates. The mobility of capital allows relatively fast capital transfers, which means shifts of production over thousands of miles.

Jobs are being lost, speed-up on existing jobs is increasing, we are being more and more disciplined, breaks are too short for necessary rest, more and

only as the basis for discussion.

The first demand that we must raise is the security of existing jobs. Each additional job loss worsens the conditions of those still working and betters the position of the employer. We must therefore fight with all our force to prevent every planned layoff. If the necessary work has already been reduced by new machinery, the remaining work must be divided among all available workers. The boss must pay for all costs, especially the guarantee of the total former wage bill.

The second demand is also a current necessity: maintain and improve our wages. This goal also demands an all-out fight, since we can't win by begging and bureaucratic deals. In order to prevent a split of the working class, we support absolute, not proportional, wage demands. The capitalists' excuse that they face foreign competition must in no case be considered. Our standpoint is not competition among robber capitals but protection of living labor power.

Third: we must resolutely oppose all attempts by the bosses to intensify the exploitation of our labor power. Tougher control and discipline of the work force is management's open goal, in order always to achieve the optimal valuation of their capital. Our counter-struggle must be to set the goal of bringing working time and work organization under the control of the workers.

#### Why is a Militant Trade Union Opposition Necessary?

The necessary struggle against layoffs, for wage improvements, against electronic supervision and control, for equal rights for women workers, etc., is opposed nowadays in all countries by an extensive trade union apparatus separated from the rank and file. The bureaucratic leaders, functionaries and shop stewards largely tied to them have secured so many privileges and are willingly accepted as negotiation partners by management. In order to preserve their advantages they always seek more compromises with the companies; and in times of crisis this can only mean compromises at the expense of the workers!

These rotten compromises are then sold, often successfully, as the results of a struggle for the workers' interests. Indeed, the bureaucracy still often succeeds in holding the trust of significant parts of the working class.

We must take note of this fact. Since their power comes in good part from the thoroughgoing liquidation of union democracy, one of our most important demands must be the creation of union democracy within unified industrial unions and the introduction of democratic control by the rank and file over the shop stewards. This struggle for the democratization of the representation of the workers' interests will be successful only if the militant and revolutionary workers join together and form a fighting trade union opposition (UO). The UO must be an organized tendency within the traditional unions. It must make use of the pressure which the rank and file exerts on the

bureaucracy, intensify it and everywhere possible act in common with its steps toward struggle.

It would be wrong to withdraw from the fossilized unions without a struggle in order to fight sectarian "autonomous" fights, as long as the bureaucracy still retains the trust of the mass of workers and doesn't act in an openly reactionary way against the workers.

Along with this clear perspective for broad and collective struggles, the UO must, however, criticize mercilessly at every moment the inconsistency and halfheartedness of the old union leaders and shop stewards. During and even before each struggle, we must warn the workers that the class collaborationist attitude of the bureaucracy tends unavoidably to subordinate the interests of the workers to the profit interests of the capitalists. Only a self-conscious



*Rome 1977: 100,000 strikers demand state aid. All roads lead to politics — reformist or revolutionary?*

rank and file movement that is ready for action can prevent this.

We must make proposals to prevent this imminent betrayal through the independent organization of the workers. It is clear to us that the worker can win only if in the final analysis the old union leadership and the old shop stewards are ousted and replaced by leaders who unconditionally represent the workers' interests.

The struggle of the UO is thus aimed in no way at the trade unions but rather against the treacherous leaders. But as long as they retain wide support among the masses, we are forced to conclude agreements with them in order thereby to be able to include the workers they lead in a common front against capital. However, we always make clear that in the final analysis we fight for the union leadership.

In order to be able to clearly confront the national limitations of the traditional leaders, we must build the UO nationally and internationally. The

superiority of the UO will then also be shown by the fact that it is able to place factory problems in relation to the entire management strategy. Information on the situation in the other workplaces must first of all produce a consciousness over the significance of international contacts. It will be easier to show that this can be only a prelude to the international coordination of workers' actions.

A further goal of the UO must be to go beyond the realm of GM in the future and make contact with union oppositions in other automobile firms and finally include the whole field of the metal industry.

### **TRADE UNION RESISTANCE STRUGGLE AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATION (The IKL's conception of its work in oppositional rank and file groups at GM)**

As a small organized part of the Austrian vanguard we see it as our task to overcome the isolation and dispersion of the progressive and militant workers, which includes ourselves.

Because of the lack of a revolutionary pole in the form of a revolutionary party and international, the dispersion and partial disorientation of large parts of the working class is no accident but is causally determined. The leadership crisis of the proletariat means for us not simply the lack of a revolutionary organization, but at the same time the absence of a revolutionary program conforming to today's conditions.

If only a Revolutionary Communist Party were in position to consolidate fighting and revolutionary elements in the unions on a communist trade union program and take successful steps toward building an international, revolutionary tendency in the unions. Unfortunately we have not yet moved very far towards this goal of ours.

For us, the unity of theory and practice is no empty phrase. Without political practice, from the armchair only, apart from the class struggle -- a revolutionary program cannot be further worked out. On the other hand, practice which does not rest on any program, or which is not aimed toward building a revolutionary program today, is in the final analysis without orientation.

This explains why the IKL, as a Trotskyist organization, helped from the beginning to build up the Group of Oppositional Workers at GM/Austria and keep it alive. We seek to the best of our abilities to plan and carry out common work in all actions with the GOA.

Along with this practical common work, however, we see it as our most important task to further develop our political answers beyond the common understanding of the GOA and introduce them as revolutionary propaganda within the GOA and also in the factory.

As we have already made clear in the joint proposal of the GOA and the IKL, we consider it to be the right and the duty of every political current to

put forward their views on matters beyond the united action. We must not act as if we all had the same opinions. For this reason we would like to outline here, however briefly, our perspective in connection with the joint discussion proposal of the GOA and the IKL for the first international GM conference.

For us, the cause of the crisis lies in the ultimate fall of the rate of profit. Only the workers produce surplus-value. Since automation and rationalization of production put more and more pressure on the workers to produce more and more cars with fewer and fewer workers, the surplus-value contained in one car becomes less and less. Even if all cars were actually sold and their total surplus-value thereby realized, the rate of profit must necessarily drop in the long run. In addition, the automobile market of the imperialist countries is very quickly satiated. This has to further worsen the profit situation of the industry and further sharpen its competitive struggle.

The capitalists now seek to counter this falling tendency of the rate of profit. On the one hand, productivity and production are increased through enormous investment programs, in order to overtake competition in the short run. This leads for the most part to the decrease of the workforce. On the other hand, production costs are reduced through wage reductions and electronic supervision systems.

Through these measures, of course, the produced surplus-value does not increase. On the contrary, it falls. Still, those capitals which work with above average productivity can realize as their own profit surplus-value produced in other factories with below average productivity. This raises the competitive struggle, reduces the overall possibility of creating profits and thereby accelerates the tendency towards capitalist crisis.

If we want to achieve continuous success against the capitalist offensive that is under way, we must inseparably link all steps that we are already taking today with the perspective of breaking this profit-logic and transforming the economy according to our interests. One step in this direction is the struggle for the organization of factory committees and control commissions to fight for the right to inspect the company books and thereby smash business secrets.

This demand becomes especially acute when the company bosses move to mass factory shutdowns and layoffs. It will then be necessary to go further. Should the bosses explain that they can't maintain every job, we must demand their expropriation without compensation, the takeover of the factories as common property and the operation of production under workers' control.

Workers' control of production, as opposed to any form of co-determination, is the unavoidable consequence of every uncompromisingly led economic struggle. Thus it has a central place in our propaganda. More and more workers will recognize on the road to resistance struggles that they too must not shrink from a counteroffensive if they wish to defend their

interests seriously. Every economic struggle, however, becomes political at a certain point. Then the state and the government intervene, naturally on the side of the capitalists.

The slogan of control over production must not be separated from the question of arming the workers. First, strike pickets must be armed as required, and ultimately workers' militias against police and fascists will be a life and death question. The most recent experiences, for example in the British coal miners' strike, show this necessity with all clarity.

All revolutionary unionists must be fully understand that their struggle for the working class' necessities of life will sooner or later throw them up against the question of state power.

The goals of our struggle stated here represent for us a bridge meant to lead the struggle over the immediate daily interests of the workers to the final goals of the working class. We must therefore be prepared for the class struggle to contribute inevitably to this confrontation -- and we ought also to have an answer for it. According to all the teachings of history, this can only mean: rule by the working class, that is, the revolutionary seizure of power by the proletariat democratically organized in councils.

We must not shrink from the dimensions of this perspective. As well, in view of the present nearly hopeless situation, the feeling of powerlessness must not become triumphant. Every long march begins with the first step.

Already today, a consistent struggle for the vital interests of the workers requires international organization. The international opportunities of capital must become counterposed international opportunities of the workers. A vanguard role in this is being played by the workers of multinational firms. They are especially affected by international transfers of capital and can only defend themselves through an equally worldwide counter-strategy. The coordination of struggle actions across national boundaries is a necessary condition for any effective strategy against capital; national limitations in the union movement serve the bourgeoisie exclusively.

International workers' solidarity, however, is a powerful weapon of the workers against the bourgeoisie. With this meeting a step in this direction has already been taken. The question today is whether every possibility and necessity is clearly seen. Both should be expressed in our decisions:

\*On the one hand, the goal of a fighting union opposition on an international scale, which bases itself on the principles of a workers' united front: unity in action against the class enemy; freedom of political counterposition in the workers' movement; the right to criticism and propaganda for all political currents of the workers' movement. March Separately, Strike Together!

\*On the other hand, the first concrete steps in this direction with regard to the prevailing powers. We have outlined our relevant concrete conceptions in 20

the joint discussion proposal of the GOA and the IKL. We would like to advocate this political orientation at the first international conference of GM rank and file groups, and we seek thereby to convince the greatest possible number of colleagues of it. Moreover, we will strive to support all class struggle attempts at GM, as in the past, as well as possible.

In this sense we welcome the realization of this conference as a step in the right direction, and we wish it every success and fruitful discussions.

## GOA: PROPOSAL FOR AN ELECTORAL PLATFORM

We are a group of co-workers with various political views who have come together to run in the coming shop steward elections. We see ourselves forced to take this step because the policies of the current stewards have meant constant retreats from the attacks of the company on our working conditions and standard of living. In the situation where the company can only strengthen its survival in the economic crisis at our expense, we, however, can improve our working and living conditions only if we undertake a serious resistance against the company. This requires shop stewards who act consistently in the interests of the workforce!

### WHAT IS THE "SLATE FOR WORKFORCE DEMANDS"?

We are a non-partisan group of co-workers joined together on the basis of our electoral program. The members of the slate come from diverse political directions, and what unites us is the wish to have a union and shop stewards who stand consistently for the interests of the workforce. Our electoral program is, so to say, our least common denominator; but it is not a muzzle. Each of us may interpret this platform according to his own political opinion! And since we are not a united bloc, we have every freedom to criticize one another. We don't believe that we have found the key to ultimate wisdom with our platform, and we are therefore grateful for any suggestion on the part of our colleagues. Finally the most important thing: each of you is heartily invited to join the "Slate for Workforce Demands" and work with it. For every success!

## LRP Reply

### THE CENTRALITY OF THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

The documents written by the Austrian comrades attempt to deal with one of the most difficult problems faced by Marxists today in the advanced capitalist "West": How to convince militant workers of the validity of communist ideas, at a time when many workers in these countries, perhaps still a majority, retain their hopes for a return to the post-World War II period of prosperity in the imperialist countries.

The IKL and the GOA are aware that world capitalism is facing a serious crisis. Their documents suggest a view resembling our own, that the unique con-

junction of American hegemony and worldwide working-class defeats which created the post-war boom is over, and therefore that the boom cannot be repeated without an overwhelming offensive by capital against the proletariat. Indeed, in most of the advanced capitalist world, working class conditions have deteriorated markedly since the 1960s. Yet there is still a strong memory of the boom among workers, of a period when they made gains with relatively little resistance from the capitalists.

This is especially true in the U.S., where the prosperity lasted relatively long and started from the highest level, and in some countries like Austria, where Social Democratic governing parties built up a vast array of "social partnership" programs promising to secure the workers' interests through good times and bad. This left the workers ill prepared for the crisis the system has now entered. In the U.S., the trade union bureaucracy extended its strategy of class collaboration to the point where today, when profits are precarious, it seeks to avoid every confrontation. In Austria, Social-Democratic ex-Chancellor Bruno Kreisky's policy of "sublimation of the class struggle" also left the working class with a leadership addicted to betrayal.

It is the responsibility of Marxists -- the only reason for our organized existence -- to show our class the way forward in the class struggle, based on a scientific understanding of capitalist reality. The conditions just outlined make our task especially difficult but all the more necessary, if the working class is not to be totally taken by surprise when the all-out capitalist attack begins.

Communist work does not take place in a political vacuum. The post-war prosperity bubble gave birth to a vastly expanded middle class throughout the world, interpenetrated with the working class at one end of its spectrum in the form of a powerful labor aristocracy. These layers have immediate material interests in preserving their gains won under capitalism and therefore in preserving capitalism itself; they provided the basis for a historical re-strengthening of reformism.

The reformist resurgence made itself felt through political parties, Social Democratic and Stalinist, as well as through the labor bureaucracy at the economic level. In their day Lenin and Trotsky pointed out that the class struggle in the epoch of capitalist decay could be summed up as the fight for the leadership of the working class: the combat between revolutionaries and reformists. In our day the necessity for Bolsheviks to frame their work according to this principle has been redoubled by the fact that authentic communism was nearly eradicated during the post-war period.

#### Unity Plus Independence

The classical Bolshevik method for work in the class struggle is two-edged: on the one hand, a clear independent communist presence, both inside and out-

side the trade unions, fighting for our analysis and strategy; on the other, common struggles with militant workers despite the reformist ideas they still hold. Unity in action and absolute independence in political program have always been the hallmarks of Leninists.

The difference between communists and centrists, those vacillators who affirm Marxism in often sincere rhetoric but who trail at the heels of reformism in reality, is not over whether to work with the mass of reformist-minded workers but over how to do it. Centrists see reformism as a partial movement forward, a limited form of progressive politics, a blunted instrument that simply doesn't go far enough. Bolsheviks recognize reformism as counterrevolutionary and fight it as such. We work together with reformists in joint actions for even very limited demands; in such work communists attempt to prove through the conduct of the struggle that the reformist leaders, because they are committed above all to the preservation of capitalism, are in fact enemies of the working class, that they will not fight for the workers' needs when these come into sharp conflict with the capitalists' drive for profits.

The organizational vehicles for these common struggles are many and varied: caucuses, strike committees, mass meetings, etc. These are necessarily temporary, thrown up by the workers according to the special needs of their immediate struggles. Communists in the unions also need to be represented by distinct party fractions, sections of the revolutionary organization concentrating on particular groups of workers and intimately familiar with the details of their struggles. It is critical that the communist voice not be confused with the organs of the broader groups that the revolutionaries work with and within. Otherwise it gets blurred with that of the reformist leaders, and exposing the reformists' capitulations becomes impossible.

#### The Trotskyist Transitional Program

A central axis of communist work in the unions is the Transitional Program written by Leon Trotsky in the late 1930s. This program is based on the understanding that capitalism has entered its epoch of de-

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say, so that the fight for socialism is on the agenda. The Transitional Program is not itself the socialist program of revolution, but rather a program for the trade unions and other mass workers' organizations. It takes the key demands of the workers to the highest level possible within the confines of capitalism and demands that the reformist working-class leaders carry out these demands despite the counter-interests of the capitalists. It is a weapon for confronting the reformist misleaders, exposing their betrayals of the class struggle and counterposing the alternative of the revolutionary party.

Doing away with the old division between the minimal (reform) program and the maximal (socialist) program, the Transitional Program is meant to serve as a bridge to move workers' from their current consciousness to the program of socialist revolution; it is therefore a substitute for the reform program. It joins together communists' work inside the trade unions and their revolutionary activity outside. In Trotsky's words, "The present epoch is distinguished not for the fact that it frees the revolutionary party from day-to-day work but because it permits this work to be carried on indissolubly with the actual tasks of the revolution."

The last thing that Trotsky was trying to accomplish with the Transitional Program was to blur the political line between revolutionary and reformist politics. He took great pains to make the distinction clear. For example, he labeled the key demand for the seizure of capitalist property "expropriation" so that no one would confuse it with the reformists' slogan of nationalization; he sought no agreement on wording to disguise a vital disagreement on content.

### **Decline of the Communist Tradition**

Unfortunately the communist tradition of Lenin and Trotsky was severed by the Stalinist counterrevolution, World War II, the post-war defeats worldwide, and the temporary re-invigoration of capitalism that resulted — which shattered the international proletariat. The same middle-class explosion that bolstered reformism infested the ranks of the Fourth Internationalists and transformed them into the myriad varieties of centrists we see today. Largely driven out of the working class, they recruited more and more from the intelligentsia and over time abandoned the proletarian vantage point. A precious lesson of the past was lost: that intellectuals and students could provide valuable aid to the working-class vanguard on the condition that they broke decisively from the middle-class world view. Gradually, the perception that Bolshevism amounted to nothing more than middle-class radicalism shorn of its limitations -- pressed to its "logical" conclusion -- replaced the communist view that the two represent counterposed class positions.

When such centrists looked at the industrial working class they saw many who accepted capitalism and expected their well-being to come from within the sys-

tem rather than from revolution. Regarding themselves as outsiders, the centrists sought to win respect by "orienting towards the working class" -- entering the unions and becoming the most militant fighters for immediate demands. The frightening idea of revolution was safely tucked away into the safe realm of the distant future. As a consequence, there are groups claiming to be Marxist, Leninist and Trotskyist engaging in trade union practices that restore the old minimal/maximal approach of the reformists; their concentration on trade unionist struggles for immediate interests is relieved occasionally by Sunday sermons on the need for socialism. On the rare occasions when they advance the Transitional Program, they substitute it for the socialist program, not for the minimal program of reforms.

Today especially, when the traditional reformists offer so little struggle and so much pure capitulation, many leftists think it sufficient to counterpose a minimal program of reforms to the leaders of reformism themselves. Likewise, they offer not a vanguard leadership but a more militant reformist leadership. The rightward shift of reformism in today's crisis of capitalism exerts a powerful magnetic pull on the extreme left. As the post-war bubble collapsed and the material basis for the middle class began to radically contract, the old petty-bourgeoisified working-class parties accelerated their dissolution and the more left-leaning centrists rushed in to take up the slack. Unfortunately they will play a critical role in the class struggle, which means that the combat between centrists and authentic communists for proletarian leadership is especially crucial. Our need to use the Transitional Program as a tool for separating workers with reformist illusions from their misleaders becomes ever more important. Above all, it must be rescued from misuse by the centrists.

### **A "Least Common Denominator" Program**

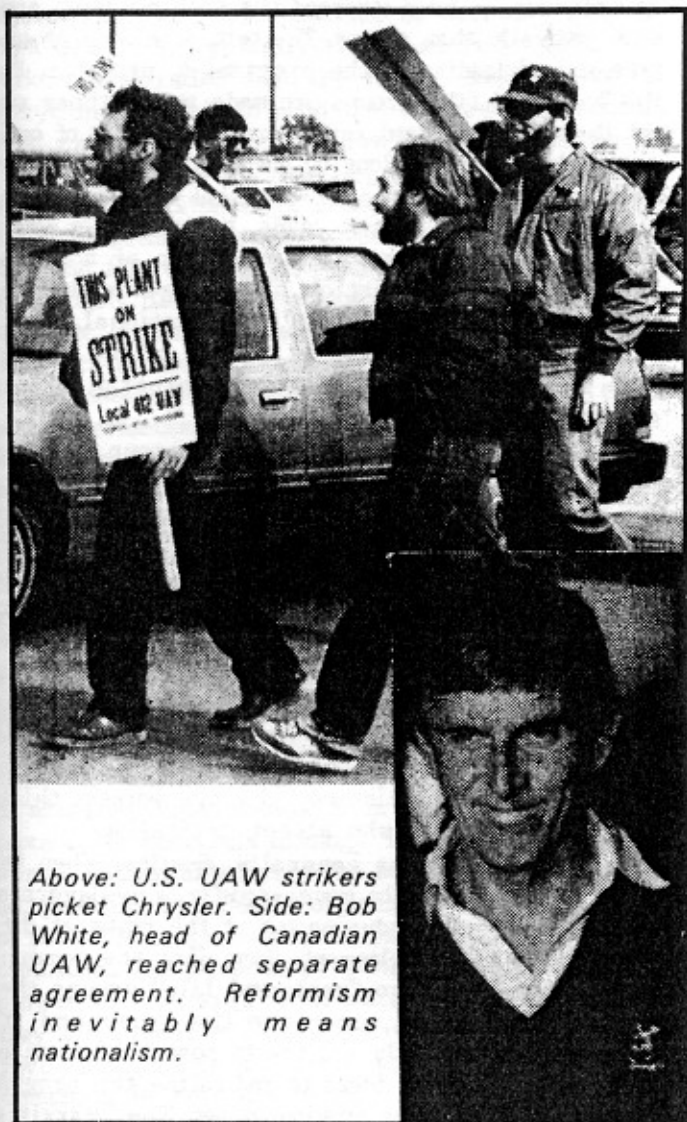
In the morass of groups around the world claiming adherence to Trotskyism, there are a few that genuinely strive to resurrect an authentic communism against the capitulationist history of the "official" Trotskyist internationals. The IKL is one of them. That is why we read with genuine regret the IKL's documents reprinted here.

The IKL's method is completely different from that taught by Lenin and Trotsky. The Group of Oppositional Workers (GOA) which the IKL supports is not a united front for common struggle but a propaganda bloc for a common strategy with non-revolutionaries -- militant but reformist workers. It calls not just for mass action by the workers, as would a united front, but also for a specific program with reformist content: "our least common denominator." And it poses this in specifically reformist terms: "What is decisive for us GM workers is to achieve the greatest possible mobilization for our immediate interests."

To see what this approach means, look at the demands in the IKL/GOA proposal. They include: mainten-

ance of all jobs, higher and more equal wages, and workers' control over hours and conditions. The GOA's platform for shop steward elections contains these and other more specific demands.

This program as it stands is an absurdity. Rather than being immediate and practical as it presents itself, it is in reality utopian. It does not state that its demands, limited though they are, can no longer be achieved under capitalism (with occasional and temporary exceptions). It does not explain that its various demands, some to a great degree, all make inroads into profits -- and that capitalist prof-



Above: U.S. UAW strikers picket Chrysler. Side: Bob White, head of Canadian UAW, reached separate agreement. Reformism inevitably means nationalism.

itability is very precarious today. The program thus perpetuates the myth that such demands are achievable simply as reforms under today's crisis conditions.

The union leaders know how dubious such reforms are -- that is why they work overtime to avoid fighting for even their own absolutely minimal demands. Some of them were militants and leftists in their youth but have since become "realistic"; most of them can compare the apparently prosperous days of the 1950s and 1960s with today and explain that "excessive" gains for the workers are impossible now, because of foreign competition or some other lie. Their

behavior proves that a reformed capitalism is out of the question today. There is no middle way between reaction and proletarian revolution.

The difference between the militant reformist workers in organizations like the GOA and those in the bureaucracy is that the bureaucrats have already learned the futility of fighting for a minimal program. Thus the field is left open to those who still retain reformist illusions. The IKL, in aligning itself with the GOA, is pitting an illusory reformist program against bureaucratic semi-reformism. It hopes, evidently, that the reformist militants will eventually grow tired of hitting their heads against brick walls and will thereby become revolutionists. Unfortunately, consistent reformism only leads to consistent defeats; it burns out workers, disorients and cynicizes them. It sets them up not for revolution but for counterrevolution and fascism.

### Reformist Internationalism

I likewise, the document's internationalism is utopian precisely because it is posed in a narrow reformist way. It calls for an international rank and file opposition in a single industry based on the above demands. This program does not address the international capitalist crisis but only the crisis in the automobile industry. It focuses only on union issues while ignoring the larger political questions. And therefore this aspect too perpetrates a falsehood. The IKL knows perfectly well that reformism is incapable of uniting the working class, especially across national boundaries. One need only look back at the collapse of the Second International in World War I to see how reformist leaderships split along national lines under extreme pressure. As the current imperialist rivalry heats up, it doesn't take a crystal ball to predict that international solidarity based on reformist agreements will prove to be equally empty.

Despite the IKL/GOA's insistence on internationalism, a program for international workers' collaboration which does not specify the enemy as capitalism (and therefore the solution as socialist revolution) is worthless. Capitalism, in order to survive, must divide the working class along all possible lines, especially nation against nation. A fight for higher wages is excellent, but if the workers do not understand the nature of the enemy they will easily fall into one of the myriad nationalist traps -- protectionist trade barriers, schemes to invest capital only at home, etc. "The working class has no country," Marx wrote, and this profound insight into the capitalist world is the primary barrier between revolutionary and reformist politics.

### Rope or Platform?

The IKL's method not only deceives workers; it deceives the would-be revolutionaries themselves. For a "least common denominator" program shared by everyone "according to his own political opinion" is no equal compromise. A reformist, however militant, may

give up one or a few prized (and frequently unattainable) demands; a "revolutionary" adhering to this program gives up the chief goal, revolution. Likewise, the revolutionary asserts that the slate is an effort to "stand consistently for the interests of the workers," whereas in all honesty he must really believe that his colleagues who oppose revolution cannot possibly stand consistently for the working class.

But isn't this unfair to the IKL? Doesn't the GOA document contain, surely at the IKL's insistence, the statement that everyone in the GOA has the right to criticize one another's interpretation of their common platform? It does say this, but the very adherence to a common program sharply delimits the kind of criticisms that can be made. Revolutionaries criticize reformists on the grounds that if they are adamant against overthrowing capitalism, they must inevitably betray the interests of the working class and even the minimal programs that they themselves stand for. We doubt that the IKL can say this openly about its non-revolutionary colleagues in the GOA; for example, in the separate IKL document discussing its work with the GOA there is no such criticism.

Imagine what this criticism would be like if actually carried out. IKL members on the common slate would state that they were revolutionaries holding the only consistent working-class position. But they would also urge workers to vote for colleagues, who, it must be admitted, will betray when the struggle reaches a crisis. "We stand on a common electoral platform that means opposite things to each of us; trust us nevertheless." Most workers won't believe this, and we certainly don't.

The classic Bolshevik tactic for such a situation is "critical support," the opposite of the IKL's attitude towards the GOA. In the Bolshevik tradition, communists speak to the workers as follows: You have confidence in these militant candidates; we do not. You believe their program of reforms is desirable and possible; we think a revolutionary party and socialism are required to achieve anything serious or lasting. We do not wish to confuse our program with theirs. Yet we do not want to be responsible for the defeat of leaders you have trust and hope in; and we do want the illusions in their program to be exposed. Therefore we will support them in the elections because we support your interests and your victory. In supporting them we insist on the right to say that we believe their program won't work, and we say so. Our support, in Lenin's phrase, is like that given by the rope to the hanged man: it is meant to ensure that the betrayals we foresee do not get carried out. In contrast, the IKL supports its colleagues in GOA by putting a common platform under their dangling feet.

### **The "Rank and File" Fraud**

Despite the platform's insistence that the GOA is not a uniform bloc, in reality the IKL is covering for a reformist program and for potential reformist, though militant, leaders. It is significant that the

IKL chooses not to use the scientifically precise word reformist to characterize its colleagues' militant ideas; it calls them "rank and file" programs. This is either a serious misunderstanding or opportunist diplomacy. In either case it means misleadership of the rank and file workers the GOA addresses.

The term "rank and file" caucuses applied to oppositional groups of workers in industry is not an IKL invention. Many centrist outfits -- in the U.S. the International Socialists and its splinters; in Britain the Socialist Workers Party and the Workers Power group -- have stressed the same concept, some more radically than others. The term itself is as untrue and misleading as the program it projects. For the "rank and file" groups are made up of those who put themselves forward as leaders. The masses of ordinary workers do not belong to these groups -- only unusually militant workers do, who seek to lead in the class struggle (or in some cases, to take over union office whether they provide leadership or not). The "rank and file" designation also suggests that the workers' problems are chiefly organizational, and it prevents the workers (both in and out of the caucus) from seeing the need to counterpose program to that of their reformist leaders.

In some cases the "rank and file" group is nothing more than a front group controlled by the operating leftist formation. It is designed to put forward a "limited program" while the leftists running it save the "additional" steps for themselves. In other cases the "rank and file" group is wider; we suspect that the GOA is of the latter type. But in both cases the "rank and file" label is meant to reflect what the leaders (both the leftists and their colleagues) think will be acceptable to the real rank and file. It is an artificial program manufactured by would-be leaders aimed at summing up "what the workers think" -- workers, that is, who accept capitalism.

One of two things generally results. When the working class begins to move rapidly, new layers of potential leadership advance out of the ranks at different rates and development. Some join the communists, others join the "rank and file" groups they find. Of the latter, some take the group and its program very seriously and try to pose more advanced and farther-reaching ideas to radicalize the program beyond the limitations previously set. The "Marxists" typically resist such attempts at radicalization, fearing that their group will move away from what the mass of workers can accept. Thus the left acts to police a "least common denominator" program.

Tragically, those workers who have come to understand that militant non-communist politics are wrong are turned into practitioners of that hopeless program in practice. Without the "Marxists" working night and day to limit the struggle to their militant reform program, this program would have far less currency. The choice between reform and revolution would be much clearer. Indeed, it is not unusual to see "rank and file" groups in which all the militants



really regard themselves as socialists who are sticking to the lowest common denominator program, not their own revolutionary views, because that is what they think the rank and file wants. Without realizing it they are echoing the old reformist minimal-maximalists with even less Sunday socialist rhetoric.

Alternatively, in situations where there is little working-class activity, the "Marxists" either abandon their "rank and file" group or else abandon their would-be vanguard group in favor of the former. Almost always, they become cynical over the failure of the "rank and file" outfits to actually win the rank and file. Typically they conclude that the workers have failed them, the sincere leaders who did everything possible to prod the masses into motion, even crystallizing their "own" program for them.

In either case the centrists delude chiefly themselves. The ranks never hold any "least common denominator" program; in practice, consciousness is mixed. Rank and file workers want many things, but they are not socially blind. They accept the capitalist system as a fact of life along with their own apparent inability to create an alternative. They are also very cynical about all would-be leaderships, given their past experiences. However, once workers do begin to move they recognize their own power and their political horizon widens; they fight for things they didn't believe possible the day before. The logic of struggle leads them to transcend yesterday's consciousness. That is when, if trapped in a "rank and file" group, they try to push it beyond its set limits.

Marxists are materialists who regard themselves as part of the working class, a section which understands in advance the class's real interests and uses this understanding to combat workers' false consciousness. For false consciousness is not a partial form of advanced consciousness; it is simply false, an acceptance of bourgeois ideology in a particular form. What fundamentally forces the workers into motion is not prodding by talented organizers or the attraction of palatable programs but the material conditions of capitalism. The purpose of a Marxist program is to project the workers' real material interests, what they will discover in the course of struggle as it reveals both the nature of the world and their capacities in relation to it.

In contrast, the "rank and file" group is a creation of idealistic thought: approach the workers from outside, find an approximation of what workers think and they will follow it step by step towards revolution. The centrists who practice it do not combat but accept the workers' false consciousness.

The rank and file conception, by the way, is entirely foreign to the Trotskyist tradition. A recently published collection of writings of the U.S. Trotskyist leader James P. Cannon is illustrative. In a polemic against the Stalinists' use of the term, Cannon got right to the point:

"The chatter about 'rank-and-file leadership' is a disgrace for communists. Such horseplay can

very well be left to the confusionists of syndicalism who object to the idea of a workers' political party on the grounds that the masses need no leaders. This demoralizing nonsense only hampers the organization of the working class and thus serves the bourgeoisie. The mission of the communists is to educate the workers, not to muddle and confuse them; to aspire, frankly, to lead them in their struggle, not to trail behind them and cater to ignorance and prejudice with demagogic slogans." (The Communist League of America 1932-34, page 99.)

### Why No Union Democracy?

The false and misleading character of the IKL's particular version of the "rank and file" approach derives from some assumptions explicit or implicit in their documents. One of these is the statement that the union bureaucrats' power "comes in good part from the thoroughgoing liquidation of union democracy." The demise of union democracy is a fact, but it is not an isolated factor that can be cured by such reforms as the IKL/GOA proposal for "unified industrial unions and the introduction of democratic control by the rank and file over shop stewards." Even if such measures were adopted they would quickly become eroded again, under the same pressures that have killed off union democracy in the first place.

Union democracy was lost as a consequence of the development of the labor aristocracy in the trade unions, itself a result of the imperialist epoch of capitalism and its drive toward increased inequality within and between nations. More directly, democracy's decline derives from the growing penetration of the bourgeois state, a penetration encouraged both by the union bureaucrats and their social-democratic political counterparts (in the U.S., the liberal Democrats). When the GOA/IKL calls for a "militant union opposition" as the only way to re-create union democracy, it again demonstrates the reformist nature of its conception. Union democracy will be achieved only through a revolutionary struggle to overturn state power, not by action within the confines of the system. Any fight for union democracy must include mobilizing the workers against the reformist party -- which cannot be done by the "least common denominator" bloc envisioned by the IKL.

### No Revolutionary Party

A second assumption behind the IKL/GOA strategy is that workers are not yet ready for revolutionary politics. The "least common denominator" approach deliberately leaves out the counterposition of the revolutionary party to the reformist parties: the GOA is "non-partisan." Hence the most that can be accomplished is the construction of a militant reformist leadership in the unions. This strategy would be described by the American left as "building the movement" first. In the European context, it can only mean acceptance of the existing worker-based parties,

the social-democratic and Stalinist reformists. It was no accident that the British SWP, after years of building lowest common denominator "rank and file" groups, abandoned this perspective only to end up supporting the overt reformist politics of the Labour Party left.

Thus the IKL presents its task as "overcoming the isolation and dispersion of the progressive and militant workers, which is also ours." This isolation is blamed on the absence of a revolutionary party and program, a situation which the IKL laments. We are small and isolated, they say. We wish we had a revolutionary party and program. We really wish we could have "a communist trade union program" and "an international revolutionary tendency in the unions," but, alas, "we have not yet moved very far toward this goal of ours"; it isn't possible now. What then is to be done? Their reply: while we continue to advocate the building of the revolutionary party as our long-term goal, our practical task is first to overcome isolation. This means building groups like the GOA on a militant unionist and not a revolutionary basis.

A genuinely Bolshevik use of the united front tactic would not mean putting off the fight for revolutionary leadership in the unions. The very purpose of united front tactics is to demonstrate, in the course of action, the necessity of the revolutionary party. Divorced from the struggle for leadership, for the party, united fronts degenerate into long-term opportunist blocs. Building them means building an alternative oppositional form to the party. If this program and this group are the practical needs for today, why should workers need a party (or a pre-party group)? The revolutionary organization in these circumstances is presented mainly as the most consistent fighter for the permanent militant bloc -- not as the representative of a communist alternative. The reality of postponing the fight for the revolutionary party to a later stage is that the later stage never comes.

### What About the General Strike?

A third assumption implicit in the IKL's documents is that the revolutionary program is simply an addition to the reformist "least common denominator" program. "We see it as our most important task," writes the IKL, "to further develop our political answers beyond the common understanding of the GOA and introduce them as revolutionary propaganda within the GOA and also in the factory."

The trouble with this is that the essential revolutionary answers are incompatible with a reformist program; they cannot be based on the GOA's "common understanding." For example, the IKL is so intent on its effort to win the workers through minimal agreement that it ignores the central question of actions that can win victories. It comes close to raising the problem: "In view of the present nearly hopeless situation, the feeling of powerlessness must not become triumphant. Every long march begins with a first step." True, but it offers only the feeble and

utopian steps already discussed. That is because the real answers would require a program opposed to the reformists'.

It is astonishing that the IKL can leave out of its programs the question of the general strike. Workers do feel powerless. This consciousness, generated by years of reformist-inspired detours and concessions, is in stark contrast to the proletariat's objective power. The workers of one sector who fight another sector over a few crumbs do not see that united action would enable them to divide the whole pie.

In this context it is enormously significant that workers around the world -- South Africa and Bolivia most recently -- are rediscovering the general strike. Workers who yesterday could not conceive of such a thing now find themselves in mass motion -- even many who retain their illusions in the reformist officials who have been forced to take the lead but always seek class compromises. If revolutionaries in the industrial countries do the spadework now among the advanced workers, the consequences will be decisive when the European and North American working classes erupt in mass strikes too.

The general strike is not a panacea; it is not applicable as a strategy in every struggle. But it is indispensable in many situations, as was proven --



Mass Paris workers' demonstration says "Take Action to Win." GOA ignores general strike action.

negatively -- by its absence in the recent British coal miners' strike. Yet for all the IKL's projections of what it will do after the militant first stage is accomplished, it avoids the general strike question assiduously. The reason cannot be simply that "the workers aren't ready"; they are equally unready for some of the speculative demands the IKL does raise. No, the difficulty for the IKL is that the general strike points in practice to the need for clear-cut political answers -- which class shall rule the state. And the economic working-class power it demonstrates poses the question of revolution. But these are answers the IKL thinks must wait for the future. At the very least they would be divisive for a "non-partisan" militant union organization.

Trotskyists can and should raise many political and economic demands short of revolution. That's the purpose of the Transitional Program: it challenges the unions and their misleaders to fight for what the workers need even though they accept capitalism. But these demands -- the sliding scale of wages to combat inflation, dividing the necessary work among the available workers to end unemployment, expropriation of industry without compensation to maintain vital production during crises, etc. -- would undermine the capitalist system. The Marxist point is that the workers' needs are incompatible with capitalism; we do not hide this and suggest that non-revolutionary leadership can accomplish what it cannot.

The IKL also uses the Transitional Program, but differently. In its own document (not written jointly with the GOA) it brings forward the transitional demands of workers' control, expropriation and arming the workers. Echoing Trotsky, it refers to these as a "bridge" to working-class power. It too raises its demands on two levels. But unlike Trotsky, the IKL's two levels are the minimal reforms and the transitional bridge; that is, the transitional demands are a substitute not for the minimal program but for the revolutionary conclusion. Yes, the IKL does agree that "sooner or later" the class struggle will force the working class to consider the question of seizing state power. The problem is that the IKL's mistaken use of the Transitional Program does not lead them to fight for workers to consider that question now.

Parallel to this gross omission is the IKL's underemphasis (to say it gently) of the revolutionary party. In its most far-reaching program, it calls for "the revolutionary seizure of power by the proletariat organized in councils." It also calls for international organization of workers, but limits this to trade union organization and solidarity. It completely omits to state that revolution requires the leadership of an internationalist revolutionary workers' party. We have no doubt that the IKL comrades are for such a party: every issue of their journal carries the slogan, on the front page, "For the Reconstruction of the Fourth International." But it leaves the question of the international party as an abstraction, never made concrete.

### The Class Struggle Against Centristism

The IKL has made serious attempts to escape the centrist heritage of the pseudo-Trotskyist milieu that gave it birth. If it is to continue its fight, it must recognize that the viability of its limited democratic and "least common denominator" program is conditioned by an Austrian prosperity that is withering away. The workers swallowed the co-determination schemes of the social democrats, but that time will come to an end as the crisis intensifies. As we have explained, rank and filist schemes which stress the need for immediate minimal programs always place the blame for this unfortunate necessity on the workers' backward consciousness. But backward consciousness is

a consequence of the failure of the advanced, the "socialists," to fight for revolution rather than reform. Any left organization that breaks from the endless cycle of "necessary" reformist stages will take a giant step forward in the interest of revolution.

To its credit, the IKL has recognized that the mainstream currents which emerged from the Fourth International in the post-war years were transformed into petty-bourgeois mockeries of Trotskyism. We suggest to the IKL comrades that such a major capitulation must have not only a historical character but a class causation as well. Trotsky pointed out, correctly in our opinion, that materialists must seek a class-determined cause for major political divergences within the working-class movement.

We believe that the centrist epigones of Trotsky act as the loyal left wing of the middle-class "socialisms" that have usurped the name of Marxism. Whenever a reformist party has elaborated a petty-bourgeois program, there has always been some pseudo-Trotskyist at hand ready to portray it as a socialist program which simply doesn't go far enough. Whenever a Stalinist or nationalist force seized power in East Europe, Asia or elsewhere and proclaimed itself a popular democracy embracing all classes, it was left to the "Trotskyists" to ennoble it as a proletarian state (albeit deformed). The roots of all such cover-ups, we suggest, stem from the failure to break with middle-class radicalism. The IKL's practical work is subject to the same disease.

Now that the material bases for the parasitical strata are disintegrating, the time is ripe for a clear-cut reassertion of proletarian Marxism. For too long our banner has been usurped by the varieties of condescending saviors. Proletarians throughout the world have acquired considerable contempt for the middle-class idealists, the social engineers, pacifists and do-gooders who assume the mantle of working-class leadership. They are right.

The old order of reformism holds its sway over the workers today only because of the absence of a credible alternative. But the reform message attracts few new advocates. With the perspective of permanent revolution we can understand why: democratic gains under capitalism are so dubious that few militants are willing to dedicate their lives to such dreams. Reformism today requires cadres committed at least in theory to a socialist future. Only such people can devote themselves to a program which they mistakenly believe is a first step toward their higher goal.

We urge the comrades of the IKL and others who share similar hopes in rank and filism, least common denominator programs and the like: re-examine your practice. It is crucial to the cause of communism that the proletarian basis of Marxism be revived, that every last vestige of middle-class contamination be swept away. Only thus will the Fourth International be re-created in counterposition to the ghastly mockeries that parade under its banner today. ■

# Nicaragua

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sible Trotskyists. They broke several strikes for higher wages and workers control, sacking the offices of the CAUS union federation. And when workers at one textile factory (Fabritex, the largest in Nicaragua) could not be intimidated in any other way, they brought in the Sandinista People's Army to dismantle the factory, removing the raw materials and machines!" (Workers Vanguard, March 11, 1983.)

In contrast to this forthright account, the recent Nicabucks article makes just two formal references to unspecified "major political differences" between the Spartacists and Sandinistas, as if dismissing the workers and smashing strikes is a matter for private discussion among friends.

In defense of its new line the SL makes three important claims. First, the Bolsheviks in the early 1920s led by Lenin, as well as the Trotskyists in the 1930s, offered military aid to bourgeois regimes under attack; so the SL policy towards Nicaragua stands in the communist tradition. Besides, "who else could one give money to for the military defense of Nicaragua but the Nicaraguan government?"

Second, forced to acknowledge the familiar fact that Trotsky argued against sending funds to the Spanish Republican government during the civil war of the 1930s, they answer that his reasoning doesn't apply to Nicaragua since the Sandinista regime is non-capitalist -- the SL takes the position, silly even for pseudo-Marxists, that the Nicaraguan state has an indeterminate class character. Finally, they charge that their opponents do not understand the critical difference between military and political support.

All of these arguments are false. The second is the easiest to refute, and together with the first it shows that the Spartacists are the ones who give political support in the name of military support. We will get back to that after dealing with the Bolshevik and Trotskyist tradition.

## The Real Bolshevik Tradition

It is true that the Bolshevik government gave or offered financial and military aid to embattled "third world" regimes, for example, Kemal Ataturk in Turkey and the nationalists in China. We can account for this in several ways. The first is that the Bolsheviks had to take into account the urgency of their international position: Russia was war-ravaged, starving and isolated: it needed allies. Some principles were subordinated in order to maintain the higher principle of the survival of the workers' state, just as the principle of national self-determination had to be cast aside for the moment in the case of (Caucasian) Georgia in order to prevent imperialist Britain from gaining a foothold against the revolutionary workers' state.

Moralists like the SL do not understand that Marx-

ist principles are not trans-historical or immutable. They may be "violated" depending on concrete circumstances. As Trotsky pointed out frequently, the problem is that subordinating a principles inevitably leads to dangerous consequences which have to be weighed against the advantages. One is that future charlatans and moralists (two faces of the same phenomenon) will conclude that a once-violated principle is no principle at all and can be cast aside at will.

Secondly, the Bolsheviks distinguished between state arrangements and party activities. As various imperialists often complained, the Soviet state would trade and talk peace with bourgeois governments while the Communist International worked to undermine the same regimes. Necessity required that state deal with state, party with party. The Soviet state could not (officially) send aid to the Chinese Communists, but the Comintern did; the state aid had to go to the Nationalist regime. Whether this was right or wrong in retrospect, it was the way the Bolsheviks acted.

Thirdly, the Bolsheviks, even Trotsky, had at best an incomplete understanding of the theory of permanent revolution in the early 1920s (Trotsky didn't generalize his theory beyond Russia until after the Chinese tragedy later in the decade). They hoped that the anti-imperialist bourgeois regimes, if allied with the Soviet state serving as a guide and a model, could effectively fight imperialism. Working-class leadership in the backward countries (aside from working-class leadership from the proletarian USSR) was not seen as necessary. Indeed, it was thought to be unlikely at the time, when the proletariat was small; its importance would increase in the future. So Workers Vanguard's quotation from the Second Comintern Congress about the necessity of all communists to support bourgeois-democratic "revolutionary liberation movements" is accurate.

The Spartacists themselves had occasion in the past to argue against those who favored a permanent bloc with bourgeois forces in colonial revolutions under the heading of a strategic "anti-imperialist united front." Of course, those who supported this slogan claimed that it was "in the Bolshevik tradition," since the Soviets and the early Comintern had used it prior to Trotsky's clarification. Now the SL borrows a related political anachronism long since relegated to the dustbin of revolutionary history to justify its version of class collaboration. How soon can we expect Lenin's abandoned formula of the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" to appear in the Spartacist armory, as it has in that of the ex-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party?

The actions of the Bolsheviks followed from a mix of reasons which have to be examined in their historical complexity, not in the trivializing versions favored by the SWP and SL. But with all their problems, the Bolsheviks never surrendered their intransigence against bourgeois elements. The class question was always decisive. For example, what the SL quotes is only point (A) of the Comintern's relevant thesis.

Point (E) immediately following reads, appropriately enough: "It is necessary to struggle against the reactionary and medieval influence of the clergy, the Christian missions, and other similar elements."

Observe how the Spartacists' resolutely struggle against the Nicaraguan Christian clergy in high office: "Father D'Escoto, then fasting as a protest against Reagan's terrorists, warmly embraced our comrades." Once upon a time it would have taken considerable self-denial by the Spartacist editors to avoid swiping at the idea of fasting against imperialism. Maybe the Sandinistas should be hailed for trying to pay off Somoza's debts and thus helping the Nicaraguan masses, not just a few priests, starve their way to victory. Or is it only Polish Catholic and Iranian Moslem clergy who are truly medieval? The SL's affinity towards the petty-bourgeois Sandinistas is evident, and their admiration for the Ortegas and Borges slops over onto the D'Escotos.

Further, point (E) of the same document reads:

"It is necessary to struggle determinedly against the tendency to paint not genuinely communist revolutionary-liberation trends in the backward countries in communist colors; the Communist International is obliged to support revolutionary movements in colonial and backward countries only on condition that ... the elements of future proletarian parties which will be communist in more than name are banded together and trained to be aware of their special tasks, namely those of the struggle against the bourgeois democratic movements within their own nations; the Communist International must enter into temporary arrangements, even alliances, with the bourgeois democrats in the colonies and backward countries, but should not merge with them and should maintain at all costs the independence of the proletarian movement even in its most embryonic form."

This too is a telling point, although some of it is badly put. We support the struggle against imperialism unconditionally, even if the bourgeois bastards do suppress the independence of the proletariat, because the danger from imperialism is greater. (The only condition we place is on ourselves: that we do not forget to fight for the goals of revolution and class independence.) But the question of independence is lost on the SL. The same newspaper reports that a West Coast longshoreman comrade of theirs moved that his union local donate money to the Nicaraguan government. Why not the Nicaraguan trade unions, a parallel working-class organization? True, most Nicaraguan unions are led by Sandinistas, but it is still worth sending funds to a working-class organization rather than the government in order to show that communists stand for class independence and against popular fronts even though Sandinistas don't. Trotsky made that very point in the Spanish case:

"We will defend the idea that the trade unions should collect money not for the government but for the Spanish trade unions, for the workers'

organizations. If anyone objects that the Spanish trade union leaders are connected with the government and that it is thus impermissible to send them money, we will answer by pointing to a single example: during the miners' strike in Great Britain in 1926, we sent money to the miners' trade union, the leaders of which were closely connected with the British government. Strike committees can be reformists; they can betray; they have connections with the bosses. But we can't avoid them as long as the workers are not capable of changing them. And thus we



Ortega brothers, leaders of an "indeterminate state," confer after determinate action against workers. SL: "Which Side Are You On?"

send them the money with the risk that they will betray the workers. We warn the workers of this .." (The Spanish Revolution, page 285; this article is cited by Workers Vanguard.)

#### Trotsky on Spain

The SL also overlooks the condition placed on communists by Trotsky in the 1930s: "The whole sense of my answers is: we fight against Franco militarily in spite of the Negrin government, and simultaneously we prepare politically for the overthrow of the Negrin government. If we agree on this fundamental principle, we can't disagree on the practical consequences." (Ibid, page 291 -- a letter also cited by the Spartacists.) Obviously, it is impossible to find any calls by the SL for preparing the overthrow of the Sandinista government; instead, when they call for extending the revolution, their call is addressed to the Sandinistas above all.

One further point on the Spanish analogy: the Workers Vanguard article tries to make a distinction

between the Negrin government and the less repressive Caballero regime it followed. Since they can't escape mentioning Trotsky's hostility to communists' arming Negrin's pro-bourgeois regime, the Spartacists try to undercut it by manufacturing a supposedly different attitude toward another pro-bourgeois regime. Trotsky, they claim, opposed aid to Negrin because he was a particularly nasty pro-Stalinist rat; Caballero was a different matter. There is no basis for this distinction in Trotsky; quite the contrary. The footnote to the letter cited by the Spartacists reads:

'P.S. In the Socialist Appeal [the U.S. Trotskyists' paper at the time] of November 1, 1936, I find on the first page, in the editorial, the following sentence: 'Revolutionary workers must continue their agitation for arms for the Spanish workers and peasants, not for the Spanish bourgeois-democratic government.'

"It was written at the time of Largo Caballero, before [Negrin's] bloody repressions against the revolutionary workers. How then could we vote for the military budget for the Negrin government?"

This amounts to a word-for-word answer to the SL's invented distinction between Trotsky's attitudes toward Negrin and Caballero. Here his well-known opposition to aiding Negrin ("Collect money for the Negrin government? Absurd! We will collect money for our own comrades in Spain.") is made an elementary consequence of his opposition to aid for Caballero. The fact that the SL quoted from this document without telling the reader that the postscript says the exact opposite of what they claim shows that the Spartacists, in their rightward leap, have at least not abandoned their own precious tradition of dishonesty. They write apologetics, not science.

Even if the Negrin-Caballero distinction were true, it would undermine the SL's case for the Bolshevik tradition. For aid was given to Kemal and to Chinese leaders who fought the workers; Bolshevik support was not made conditional. If the Spartacists believe what they say, they ought to castigate Trotsky for violating the "Bolshevik principle" of aiding workers' enemies like Negrin when it suits their appetite. In reality, their distinction is just a half-baked attempt to slough off Trotsky's unmistakable opposition to workers' support for the popular front.

There is only one quotation the SL cites that appears to defend their position: "Naturally, I would help Caballero with all the material means against fascism..." This is in the Dewey Commission's report of its hearings in Mexico in 1937 (The Case of Leon Trotsky, pages 296-7), taken not from edited writings but from the verbatim transcript of hearings conducted in English, a language Trotsky did not speak fluently. Although Trotsky's defense of Marxism and Bolshevism against Stalinism here is magnificent, there are several imprecise political formulations. This reads like one, especially when compared with his several careful warnings against aiding the bourgeois regime.

Alternatively, this response by Trotsky comes at a point in the hearings when he was being pressed to say what he would do if he had state power in the USSR. Just as he demanded that we communists aid "our comrades" and that workers' unions aid similar organizations, he may have felt, like the early Bolsheviks, that state aid had to go to the corresponding state. In any case, this citation does not defend the SL's line, for the Spartacist League is not the state.

### Nicaragua — A Classless State?

In sum, the SL's citation of the Bolshevik tradition is selective and opportunist, relying on historical anachronisms and forced subordinations of principle as well as sheer retroactive inventions in order to reject the authentic underlying principles. Their excuse for this is their cockeyed theory of the Nicaraguan state: it's not capitalist because the Sandinistas haven't yet made up their minds about what to do with private property.

Never mind that the Sandinistas defend private property now, in practice, and pledge to keep doing so in the future -- what the SL thinks is in the minds of the FSLN is the basis for asserting that the state is indeterminate. Never mind that the Sandinistas defend capitalism -- the system of exploitation through wage labor -- against encroachments by the workers and peasants. Never mind that the Sandinistas use the contra-created emergency to slap the wrists of the pro-imperialist Nicaraguan press and parties while they prohibit unions from organizing and ban the right to strike. The Spartacists have conveniently forgotten the class principles that the Bolsheviks based everything on. Nor does it bother them that their opportunism requires a total absurdity for Marxists, a classless state in the modern epoch.

Leaving aside the simple impossibility of this condition, the SL really has a line that Nicaragua is a progressive (but non-proletarian) state. They show this through their warm embraces and they prove it in their program, which is decisive. For when they call on the Sandinistas to complete the revolution, they proclaim that the result will be a workers' state (with the adjective "deformed" attached for the record). Obviously the SL's position must be political, not just military, support: "progressive" is a political classification, and creating a workers' state is a political, not just military, task. The SL's insistence on the contrary can only be taken as an embarrassed maneuver to distinguish themselves from the Stalinists, who give political support to their Sandinista allies without flinching.

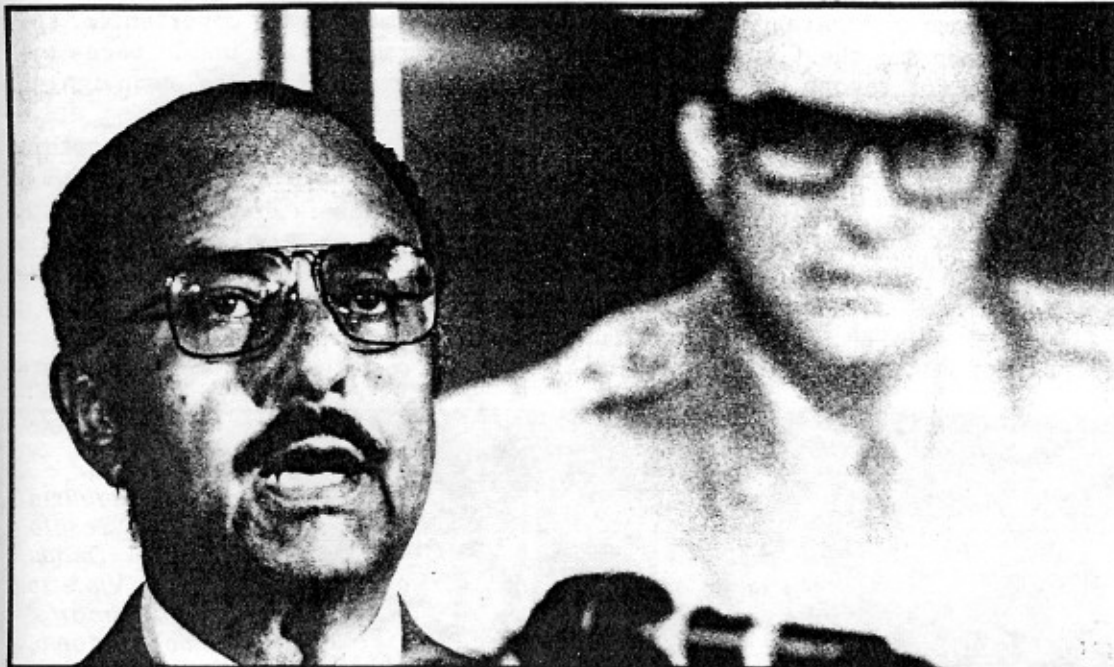
The SL doesn't even take seriously its own supposedly Trotskyist attitude towards Stalinism. They hold that the Sandinistas can at best create a "deformed workers' state"; hence the SL should at least stand for a political revolution to overthrow the regime. But they don't. Of course, giving "military support" without politically preparing for overthrowing the regime means, pure and simple, political

support. Again the real logic of the SL's position contradicts its line.

Any tendency with a hint of Bolshevism in its blood would address the working class and insist on the need for political independence from the Sandinista state -- bourgeois, "indeterminate" or even "deformed" workers'. Instead the Spartacists reduce the alternatives in Nicaragua to the Sandinistas' options. They do not even call for working-class pressure on the regime, let alone revolutionary activity. Under capitalism they call for workers to fight the bosses. Under a "deformed workers' state" like Poland

because none exists. Every issue of our magazine, every demonstration we intervene in, every effort of ours in the workplaces and trade unions offers plenty of evidence to the contrary: our attitude has always been complete hostility to the Democratic frauds. What the SL says about our opposition to "military victory" is formally true, but the context they give it is meant to hide our position of military defense of the Salvadorean rebels against the imperialists and their pawns.

What's the difference? For elaboration, we refer readers to the original polemic, "Spartacist 'Anti-Im-



*The late Anastasio Somoza, imperialism's local butcher, lives on -- in capitalists' hearts and in workers' pockets, as Sandinistas still pay off his debts to U.S. banks. Spartacist "Nicabucks" campaign contributes to this worthy cause.*

in 1980, they mock workers for eating too much and not working hard enough. Under "indeterminate" Nicaragua, their line is -- indeterminate. This method has nothing to do with Bolshevism; indeterminacy is a hallmark of centrism, vacillating between one position and another.

#### The SL's Attack on the LRP

In arguing for their anti-Trotskyist position on Nicaragua, the Spartacists have every right to attack the LRP. As they point out correctly, the objection to their "Nicabucks" campaign "parallels criticisms of the SL's Anti-Imperialist Contingents for marching with FMLN flags in El Salvador protests" made by the LRP and the group formerly called the External Tendency. But the content of their attack is contemptibly dishonest. The LRP, they claim, "opposed carrying FMLN flags because they oppose our call for military victory to the leftist guerrillas battling U.S. imperialism and its puppet government and army." What's more, "In both cases, the ET and LRP objections stem from their desire to act as a left tail on the pro-Democratic popular front."

They give not a shred of evidence to back their charge about our desires toward the Democratic Party (or about the ET's, for that matter). Nor could they,

perialism'," in Socialist Voice No. 14. In a nutshell it is the same point Trotsky made about Negrin: we fight against the imperialists militarily in spite of the pro-capitalist FMLN, and simultaneously we prepare politically for the overthrow of an FMLN government by the workers and peasants. That's why Trotsky and Lenin refused to call for the "victory" of bourgeois forces when they were forced to bloc with them for momentary military defense. The SL cannot understand this because for them "military defense" really means political support and therefore also military victory, i.e., the conquest of state power, for their petty-bourgeois allies.

Given the SL's track record for honesty in citing points of view they disagree with, we have to add that even if they understood what Trotskyists say they would still distort it. Both in content and form, the Spartacist League has taught itself to reject everything Trotskyism stands for. The road to the open rejection of Trotskyism blazed by the SWP is available to the SL as well. As with the SWP, the attempt to cover class collaboration with the Trotskyist banner may prove too laborious. If the wind shifts right, these centrists could easily give up such a hopeless effort. ■

# PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION

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## Reply to *Workers Vanguard*

# Bolsheviks, Sandinistas & Military Aid

To fight against the contra invasion of Nicaragua now sponsored jointly by Ronald Reagan and the Congressional Democrats is an obligation for anyone who stands for socialism or simply national self-determination. But just how to wage that fight in the heartland of imperialism itself is a disputed question. The present leadership of the "solidarity" movement insists that we in this country have to do what "the Nicaraguans" (that is, the Sandinista leaders) want. That has included campaigning for "lesser evils" like Jesse Jackson and Walter Mondale -- although Mondale called for militarily quarantining Nicaragua while

tion, will challenge such crass opportunism, they tried to cover their tracks on the inside pages with an article claiming that the "Nicabucks" campaign was "in the Bolshevik tradition."

Well, they were right to be leery. It has nothing at all in common with Bolshevism, as we will show. As well, part of their attack is directed against the League for the Revolutionary Party and our earlier polemic against them for an opportunist maneuver towards the rebels in El Salvador. So it behooves us to refute their anti-Bolshevik arguments now too.

The SL's growing opportunism is best demonstrated



*First Sandinista junta — Sergio Ramirez, Daniel Ortega, Violetta Barrios Chamorro, Alfonso Robelo, Moises Hassan — swears allegiance to revolution in 1979. Robelo & Co. now swear by contras; Ortega tries to placate their U.S. masters.*

Jackson urged support for Mondale. Any revolutionary with a backbone must reject such advice. But the question still remains of what positive steps to take.

The Spartacist League believes it has the answer. Covered by its usual barrage of super-Bolshevik rhetorical gas, the SL is pursuing its own version of the U.S. left's flight to the right. Instead of trying to prove itself as the best defender of beleaguered Nicaragua by raising a revolutionary strategy, the SL is vying with the official solidarity outfits for the favor of the Sandinistas.

To this end the Spartacists boast of raising \$25,000 for the Sandinista government, whose leaders "warmly embraced" them when they delivered the money in Managua. This glowing report was featured on the back cover of the Spartacist paper *Workers Vanguard* of September 16. Obviously aware that revolutionaries, perhaps even people within their own organiza-

tion, by comparing their present line with an accurate assessment of the Sandinistas made a few years ago. At a time when they had not yet conceived of embracing people they recognized as petty-bourgeois Bonapartists and enemies of the working class, they wrote:

"During the last moments of the Nicaraguan civil war, when the Sandinistas had temporarily retreated from the capital, the workers and slum dwellers took over Managua the day after Somoza fled. They sacked the barracks and military headquarters, obtaining many arms. It took the Sandinistas months to get the guns back. ... They shut down the Maoist paper *El Pueblo* after it called for peasants to occupy haciendas of the 'anti-Somoza bourgeoisie.' They arrested leaders of the Frente Obrero group and of the dissident Communist Party of Nicaragua, as well as local osten-

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